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ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES
FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY
HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY
NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
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This issue focuses on Korean philosophy. Korean philosophy bears historical influences from Chinese philosophy, both from Chinese Buddhism, which migrated to Korea around the fourth century CE and formed the basis of the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392), from which the name “Korea” is derived, and from Chinese Neo-Confucianism, which was the core of the state religion during the Joseon Dynasty from 1392 until the early twentieth century. And there are philosophical influences going both ways across the Korea Straits and the East Sea due to Japanese imperialism and war.

However, a main strand of argument of all the papers in this issue is to emphasize the ways in which Korean philosophy developed its own autochthonous interpretations of these traditions. These distinctly Korean philosophies were driven by internal features of Korean social, political, and religious life, including the particularly close connection between philosophical learning and state power. Korean state officials governed drawing directly on philosophical ideals and practices, and philosophical argumentation and interpretation were consequently and very directly forms of practical politics.

The issue contains four original papers (by Bongrae Seok, Hwa Yeong Wang, Hannah H. Kim, and Sun Kyeong Yu), a set of comments on those four papers (by Philip Ivanhoe), and separate responses by two of our authors (Seok and Kim) to the comments. With the exception of Yu’s contribution to this issue, the papers were first given at a session at the 2022 American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting, organized by A. Minh Nguyen on behalf of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies. We had hoped that all of the authors could have responded to Ivanhoe’s comments, exemplifying the kind of philosophical conversation one finds ideally at a session of this nature, but unfortunately, time constraints and the 2022 end-of-the-year holiday period intervening in the middle of our editing time meant that only Seok and Kim were able to write a reply.

Two of the four papers treat issues in Korean Neo-Confucianism of the Joseon period. Bongrae Seok’s paper reads three of the major philosophical debates of this period—the Four-Seven Debate, the Horak Debate, and the Simseol Debate—in order to argue that Korean Neo-Confucianism can usefully be understood in terms of a methodological dispute in moral psychology: Should philosophers understand the mind normatively, in light of the regulative moral ideals to which the mind ideally is directed, or should philosophers understand the mind purely descriptively, in terms of the local and causal processes and dispositions that the local instantiates? This methodological dispute is orthogonal, Seok suggests, to the standard reading of these debates in light of a substantive or metaphysical distinction between the priority of i/li (理, principle, form) and gi/qi (氣, material force, energy)—a distinction commonly mapped onto the two main schools of interpretation during this period. This reading of the tradition, for Seok, has the added benefit of bringing Korean Neo-Confucianism into the space of contemporary philosophical debates in moral psychology and metaethics, including debates about moral foundationalism, moral constructivism, Humean/Kantian moral psychology, and the modularity of moral cognition. Philip Ivanhoe, in his comments, wonders about the relation between the methodological framing that Seok proposes and the more standard metaphysical framing of the disputes. It can’t be, Ivanhoe suggests, that they are inconsistent. And one might suspect, as Ivanhoe does, that there is some connection between the methodological terms and the relative priority of i/li and gi/qi.

Hwa Yeong Wang examines the lesser-known Ritual Debate in the late seventeenth century CE, which concerned the proper way for Queen Dowager Jauí (Jauí daebi 慈懿大妃, 1624–1688; posthumous name Jangnyeol wanghu 莊烈王后) to mourn the deceased King Hyojong (孝宗, 1619–1659, r. 1649–1659). The required ritual was made more complex by the fact that King Hyojong was Queen Dowager Jauí’s stepson. The Ritual Debate was of great political consequence, in ways that Wang spells out in her paper. Yet, given the close connection between philosophy and politics in the Joseon Dynasty, the debate also has many philosophical consequences. Wang reads the debate as displaying practically and in a high register the much-emphasized centrality (political as well as metaphysical) of ritual to Confucian philosophy. That general point is importantly inflected, Wang argues, through the lens of gender, given that one of the main protagonists of the debate was the Queen Dowager. The intersection of gender and ritual opens up, for Wang, a gap between Confucian theory and Confucian practice—a gap that
might be philosophically important for feminist purposes. In response, Ivanhoe raises two general questions about the larger significance of Wang's project. The first question concerns what kind of reimagining of the concept of ritual follows from Wang's reading of the Ritual Debate, and the second concerns the relation between metaphysics and practice in Wang's reading of ritual. In the background of both questions sits the particular Korean connection between philosophy and political practice.

The other two papers focus on issues in twentieth-century Korean philosophy. Hannah H. Kim argues that it is politically and philosophically important to take seriously the North Korean state philosophy, Juche, as a form of philosophy and not to treat it, as many scholars do, as merely a philosophical sham for the use of totalitarian state power, a kind of philosophical nonsense. That is so especially, for Kim, if one wants to understand and criticize North Korean state ideology. Kim aims to make room for proper philosophical criticism of Juche first by situating it in relation to some of its philosophical roots (anticolonial and anti-imperialist Marxism-Leninism, Confucianism, and humanism) and second by arguing that some of its central tenets can be charitably interpreted as expressing ideas and positions drawn from these traditions. Kim's analysis is in line with a central strand of critical theory (from Karl Marx through to Raymond Geuss) that treats even ideology in the pejorative sense (ideology that justifies some form of oppression or domination) as containing some germ of truth. And the important idea at the core of that strand of critical theory is a humanist recognition that people follow ideologies, no matter how horrible or destructive, and that treating people as people requires that we treat them not as complete dupes of a sociopolitical order, but as recognizing and responding to something real, even if that reality is in various ways distorted and thus their responses to it are distorted. Ivanhoe asks, in response, where Kim's reading of Juche fits in the contemporary political philosophy landscape. It isn't, Ivanhoe suggests, a political philosophy based on moral principles in the vein of John Rawls. But neither is it a merely pragmatic or practical handbook for political practitioners in the vein of Han Feizi or Niccolò Machiavelli. And, Ivanhoe wonders, what exactly is the interpretive burden that Kim has set for herself in giving this defense of Juche? Is it to make any kind of positive case for Juche as a philosophy, or just the negative case of defending it against unfair criticisms, whatever philosophical merits it may have?

Sun Kyeong Yu takes on the large debate about the nature of Buddhist enlightenment. She explicates the Venerable Hyun-Eung’s conception of “revolutionary enlightenment” in terms of Thomas Kuhn’s notion of a “paradigm shift.” For Hyun-Eung, on Yu’s interpretation, coming to enlightenment involves a paradigm shift from an essentialist and realist worldview to a worldview based on a Buddhist metaphysics of dependent arising and emptiness. When such a metaphysics comes to characterize one’s worldview, one’s perspective on oneself and the world is thoroughly transformed; hence, revolutionary enlightenment. The analogy with a Kuhnian paradigm shift reveals other features of enlightenment. It is sudden, not gradual, in the sense that no accumulation of evidence (or principle or commitment or any other particular attitudes) can constitute enlightenment. Enlightenment is a shift in one’s perspective, in the frame in which one holds particular beliefs and commitments and other attitudes, accumulates evidence, and engages in particular practices. Enlightenment is a fundamental insight, not something that one “works at.” (This may be true even if—in the case of a Kuhnian paradigm shift—some gradual process is a causal precursor to enlightenment or plays some other, non-justificatory role in bringing about the paradigm shift.) All the same, there might be disanalogies. One might think that, unlike scientific paradigm shifts, enlightenment is a shift from a false frame to a true frame (in some sense of “true” and “false”), and there is only one such shift, not the multiplicity that Kuhn suggests. Ivanhoe raises another possible disanalogy in his comments. In the case of enlightenment, the enlightened person lets go of a deeply held psychological commitment to the existence of the self. Ivanhoe suggests that no such deep self-oriented commitment is at play in a scientific paradigm shift, which is usually more intellectual (though one might think there might be such commitments involved—think of the Catholic Church’s reaction to Galileo Galilei’s proposal of the modified Copernican heliocentric model of the solar system, or Albert Einstein’s rejection of quantum mechanics when he said, “God doesn’t play dice”). In the same vein, Ivanhoe inquires as to the role of practice as well as “theory” in the analogy. As philosophers of science have pointed out, paradigm shifts are as much a matter of changes in scientific practice as they are in scientific theory. Is the same true of enlightenment for Hyun-Eung and Sun Kyeong Yu?

These four papers, comments, and replies, of course, can only scratch the surface of millennia of Korean philosophy. None considers Korean philosophy prior to the Joseon period, for instance. And there is new work, to which Hwa Yeong Wang alludes in her essay, on Korean women philosophers. But hopefully this issue gives some sense of the philosophical depth and interest of the Korean peninsula, both historically and now in the present time.

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NOTES

ARTICLES

Philosophy of Mind and Moral Psychology in Korean Neo-Confucianism

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ABSTRACT
This essay discusses the unique characteristics of Korean philosophy during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) by focusing on its philosophy of mind and moral psychology. Korean Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon Dynasty is influenced by the Neo-Confucianism of Song Dynasty China, specifically the philosophy of the Cheng-Zhu school (Neo-Confucianism of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi), but it developed its own rigorous philosophical analyses of the metaphysical and moral nature of the mind, emotions, and Confucian virtues. The essay will explain the philosophical contribution of Korean Neo-Confucianism to the philosophy of mind and moral psychology through its normative approach (focusing on the regulative and ordered nature of the mind) and psychological approach (focusing on the generative and causal efficacy of the mind) to major philosophical issues of Neo-Confucianism such as the nature of the mind, morality, and emotions.

INTRODUCTION
With its long history filled with diverse schools of thought, Korean philosophy has developed many intellectual traditions. In this essay, I will discuss Korean philosophy in the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), i.e., a version of Neo-Confucianism closely affiliated with the Cheng-Zhu school of Chinese Neo-Confucianism. Neo-Confucian philosophy in the Joseon Dynasty is called Seongrihak (性理學), i.e., the study of nature (seong/xing 性) and order (i/li 理) of the universe and human beings. It is a form of Confucianism that focuses on the foundational nature of Confucian virtues and the heart-and-mind of moral excellence in terms of seong/xing (nature), i/li (order, coherence, principle), and gi/qi (material force, energy). Following the li-qi metaphysics of the Cheng-Zhu school, the major philosophical schools of Korean Neo-Confucianism are often identified as the i-school (juripa 主理派) and gi-school (jugipa 主氣派). However, Korean Neo-Confucian philosophers in this period started a unique philosophical pursuit in their debates: a coherent understanding of the nature of the mind and morality.

In the sixteenth century, Korean Neo-Confucians analyzed the moral psychological nature of the Four Emotions discussed in the Mencius and the Seven Feelings listed in the Book of Rites in the Four-Seven Debate (Sachil Nonjaeng 사칠논쟁 四七論爭, 1559–1572). In the eighteenth century, the Horak Debate (Horak Nonjaeng 호락논쟁 湖洛論爭, 1712–1724) sparked deep philosophical analyses of the pure, unaroused state of the mind that can reflect the nature of human beings. In the nineteenth century, many Korean philosophers engaged in an extended debate on the moral and ontological nature of the mind in the Simseol Debate (Simseol Nonjaeng 심설논쟁 心說論爭, 1865–1891).

An analysis of these philosophical debates will demonstrate that Korean Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon Dynasty, although heavily influenced by the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism in Song Dynasty China, developed its own philosophical tradition, a tradition of moral psychology of the Confucian heart-mind. In the following sections, I will give an account of the philosophical orientation of Korean Neo-Confucianism by analyzing the broad implications of the three major debates of the Joseon Dynasty: the Four-Seven Debate, the Horak Debate, and the Simseol Debate. Particularly, I will focus on two philosophical characteristics of Korean Neo-Confucianism.

First, Korean Neo-Confucianism is deeply invested in the moral psychological analysis of the mind and emotions. Second, the philosophical conflicts among different schools of Korean Neo-Confucianism, at least in the three major debates, can be understood as the conflict between the normative and psychological approaches to major philosophical issues of Neo-Confucianism such as the nature of the mind, moral emotions, and moral virtues.

In this essay, a normative approach refers to a theoretical viewpoint that focuses on the universal, regulative, and moral properties of the mind. In contrast, a psychological approach explains the nature of the mind and its moral emotions through local, interactive, and causal processes of the mind. Seen through the two contrastive approaches to the moral mind, one can understand that Korean Neo-Confucianism is a stimulating philosophical tradition of moral psychology that can be studied in conjunction with comparable Western philosophical theories such as moral psychological foundationalism, constructivism, and modular and non-modular processes of moral cognition.

THE FOUR-SEVEN DEBATE
The Four-Seven Debate is a philosophical debate on the moral psychological nature of the following two Confucian sets of emotions: the four intrinsically moral emotions discussed in Mencius 2A6 (pity and compassion, shame and dislike, compliance and deference, and right and wrong) and the seven feelings (joy, anger, grief, fear, love, hate, and desire) listed in the Book of Rites. In this debate, Toegye (Yi Hwang, 1501–1570) argues that the intrinsic moral nature of the Four should be clearly distinguished from the morally contingent nature of the Seven. Specifically, he suggests that the Four and the Seven should be explained by the differential contributions of i/li and gi/qi. In his second letter to Kobong (Gi Dae-Seung, 1527–1572), Toegye states that “although the neither of the two [the Four and the Seven] is separable from principle [i/li] and material force [gi/qi], on the basis of their point of origin, each points to a predominant factor and emphasis, so there is no reason why we cannot say that the one [the Four] is a matter of principle [i/li] and the other [the Seven] a matter of material force [gi/qi].” In this letter, Toegye does not deny the inseparability of i/li and gi/qi, but he
suggests that the Four should be explained by ili and the Seven by gi/qi. Since ili is normative and regulative and gi/qi is variable and contingent, the intrinsic moral nature of the Four should be explained by ili, and the variable psychological nature of the Seven should be explained by gi/qi. By proposing this type of differential explanation of the Four and the Seven, Toegye stresses the sincere moral drive behind the Four and differentiates it from the morally contingent feelings of the Seven. He believes that the mind feels emotions, but it also expresses its intrinsic moral character and regulative order. Specifically, he takes a normative approach to explain how the Four is different from the Seven.

Against Toegye's view, Kobong argues that although the Four and the Seven are different emotions in terms of their moral characteristics, they are all affective states of the mind aroused by the efficacy of gi/qi and the regulative order of ili. In other words, all emotions, whether they are the Four or the Seven, are basically the same: they are psychological states aroused by gi/qi and regulated by ili. He states that "[s]ince the mind-and-heart is a conjunction of principle [ili] and material force [gi/qi], feelings certainly combine both principle and material force. It is not the case that there is a particular distinctive kind of feelings that only issues from principle and not from material force." Here, Kobong takes a different approach, i.e., a psychological approach. He focuses on the local and interactive properties (i.e., being aroused in particular local conditions) of the Four and the Seven. Primarily, they are all emotions with the close interaction between ili and gi/qi. Therefore, it is wrong to say that the Four, because of its intrinsic moral nature, is fundamentally different from the Seven or that the Four is driven exclusively by the regulative order of ili.

The Four-Seven Debate continued with Ugye’s (Seong Hon, 1535–1598) and Yulgok’s (Yi I, 1536–1584) extended discussion. Ugye followed Toegye’s view on ili and gi/qi’s differential causation/generation (hobal 互發) to the Four and the Seven and argued for the distinction between the Four and the Seven. Yulgok, however, expanded Kobong's view and argued for ili and gi/qi’s common causation/generation (gongbai 共發) of emotions, whether they are the Four or the Seven. He states, "Without material force [gi/qi], there would not be the power of issuing; without principle [ili], there would not be that whereby it issues." To generalize, in the Four-Seven Debate, Toegye and Ugye focus on the distinctive moral or normative nature of the Four and distinguish it from the Seven, but Kobong and Yulgok focus on the common psychological nature of the Four and the morally contingent nature of the Seven. The former stresses ili’s primary or distinctive contribution to the moral nature of the mind, while the latter highlights ili and gi/qi’s common or combined contribution to the psychological nature of the mind. Specifically, for the aroused states of the mind (i.e., emotional states), the latter brings forth the critical causal role of gi/qi because gi/qi, unlike ili, has the causal efficacy to generate emotional states. From Toegye and Ugye’s perspective, however, it is not the physical efficacy of gi/qi but the normative moral order of ili that makes the Four a special set of moral emotions. Although the Four are aroused states of the mind, the physical efficacy of gi/qi does not fully explain the normative moral nature of the Four. Therefore, the Four-Seven Debate is the conflict between Toegye-Ugye’s normative approach and Kobong-Yulgok’s psychological approach to the nature of the affective moral mind.

THE HORIZON DECREASE
The same type of philosophical conflict can be witnessed in the Horak Debate and the Simseol Debate. In the Horak Debate, Han Wonjin (1682–1751) and Yi Gan (1677–1727) asked questions about the nature of human beings and the mind: Is the nature of human beings the same as that of other things (such as non-human animals)? Is the mind of the Confucian sage the same as that of ordinary people? To answer these questions, they investigated how nature (seong/xing) is reflected in the mibal/weifa state of the mind, an unaroused and transparent state of the mind. They expected to see the original nature of the mind and human beings in this resting state. In this debate, Han and Yi developed their distinctive explanations of the mind and its moral nature in this minimal state of gi/qi.

According to Yi, the mibal/weifa state is a pure and transparent state that can reveal the original nature of the mind. He states that "in its original substance, gi/qi possesses ultimate clarity and purity—this is the original state of gi/qi." However, Han understands mibal/weifa as a psychologically inactive (resting, unaroused, or dormant) state that is not necessarily pure and intrinsically good. He argues that, even in the mibal/weifa state, the variability and unevenness are not completely controlled because mibal/weifa is still a state of gi/qi. He states that “although it [the mind in the mibal/weifa state] is quiet, empty, and clear, its varying degrees of clarity and goodness cannot be avoided.”

As his explanation of the mibal/weifa state shows, Han takes a psychological approach to the mind. The mind can be contaminated and clouded by the uneven temperament of gi/qi with varying degrees of clarity and refinement. For this reason, one should think about the different types of nature (seong/xing). Because of the varying dispositions of gi/qi that affect the nature of myriad things, the nature of human beings is different from that of other things and the mind of the Confucian sage is different from that of ordinary people. However, Yi takes a normative approach to the mind and its mibal/weifa state. He takes the mibal/weifa state as an ontologically original and morally intrinsic state, i.e., a pure and transparent state of the mind that reveals the original nature of human beings (boneyonj/seong/ benranzixing 本然之性) and the original body of the luminous moral virtue (myeongdeok bonche/mingdebenti 明德本體). The Horak Debate, therefore, is another example of how the normative and psychological approaches divide Korean Neo-Confucianism into two competing viewpoints on the nature of the mind and morality.

THE SIMSEOL DEBATE
The Simseol Debate occurred in the later part of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century in the Joseon Dynasty. Korean philosophers such as Yu Jung-Gyo (1832–1893), Kim Pyeong-Mook (1819–1891), and Jeon Woo (1841–1922) debated the nature of the mind in relation
to the nature of human beings and the original body of luminous virtue (myeongdoek/mingde 明德). The debate started when Yu defended Yi Hang-Ro’s (1792–1868) view (the mind is i/li, i.e., the nature of the mind lies in its normative order of i/li) against Jeon’s criticism (the mind is gi/qi, i.e., the nature of the mind lies in its sensory and reactive functions) and attempted to clarify Yi’s view, in consideration of Kim’s critical suggestions, to support the mind theory (Simseoil) of the Hwa Seo School (華西 學派) of Korean Neo-Confucianism.

Yi is the founder of the Hwa Seo school within the lineage of Yulgok’s gi/qi philosophy, but he stresses the regulative moral order by stating that the mind is i/li. Against Yi’s statement, Jeon Woo points out that nature (seong/xing) is i/li but the mind is gi/qi, and argues that it is wrong to characterize the mind as i/li. Yi Jung-Gyo, one of Yi’s disciples, defended Yi’s view against Jeon’s criticism. He explained and clarified Yi’s view and argued that the mind operates and works with gi/qi, but its moral nature is i/li. He states that “[t]he mind is gi/qi and a thing. However, if one moves up to its higher dimension and refers to its virtue, it is i/li.” The debate continued with Yi’s careful and articulated defense of Yi’s view against other criticisms raised by Jeon. The debate continued fourteen years from 1873.

When Yu shared his thoughts with Kim Pyeong-Mook, one of the senior scholars of the Hwa Seo School, another debate started within the Hwa Seo School in 1886. Kim had some reservations on Yu’s clarification and supplementation of Yi Hang-Ro’s thesis and argued that the mind has the intrinsic moral ability of luminous virtue (myeongdoek) and ingenious wisdom (shimmyeong). Later, a similar debate on the nature of the mind started in other schools of Korean Neo-Confucianism beyond the Hwa Seo School when Jeon Woo, who represents the Gan Jae School (艮齋學派), criticized the Han Joo school (寒洲學派), specifically Yi Jin-Sang’s (1818–1886) view that the mind is i/li. Gwak Jong-Seok (1846–1919), one of Yi Jin-Sang’s disciples in the Han Joo School, defended Yi’s view and argued against Jeon Woo’s view that the mind is gi/qi.

At the surface, the Simseoil Debate follows through different theories of mind from the perspective of the Neo-Confucian li-qi metaphysics (i.e., the mind is i/li or gi/qi). However, in its deep foundation, the debate reveals the conflict between the two different approaches to the mind. Yi Hang-Ro, Yu Jung-Gyo, Kim Pyeong-Mook, and Jeon Woo are all in the same philosophical lineage of Yulgok’s gi/qi philosophy, i.e., a school of Korean Neo-Confucianism that highlights gi/qi’s physical efficacy in active psychological processes of the mind. However, Yi Hang-Ro and Kim Pyeong-Mook (Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Hwa Seo School) understand the mind from the perspective of the moral order of i/li and its luminous virtue. According to them, the mind is not just psychological processes and emotional arousals but the foundation of intrinsic goodness and moral wisdom. Although they do not deny that gi/qi is part of the mind, they argue that the mind (i.e., moral consciousness, agency, and sense of duty) can be best understood from the perspective of the moral order (i/li) embedded in its luminous virtue. Jeon Woo, however, strongly criticizes the “the mind is i/li” thesis of the Hwa Seo School. The main point of Jeon’s criticism is that the thesis is in conflict with the motto of Yulgok school’s gi/qi philosophy (seong/xing [nature] is i/li, but sim/xin [mind] is gi/qi 性即理 心是氣). Jeon states that “[u]ltimately it [Yi Hang-Ro’s view] comes down to the problem of taking gi/qi [of the mind] and turning it into i/li.”

The philosophical conflict in the Simseoil Debate, therefore, can be understood as the conflict between the two approaches to the mind and its moral nature. Although the debate continued with the apparent struggle to integrate the i/li theory (such as Yi Hang-Ro’s) and gi/qi theory of the mind (such as Jeon Woo’s), it reveals a deep philosophical divide between the normative and psychological approaches to the mind within the Yulgok school’s gi/qi philosophy. This type of philosophical conflict can be witnessed regardless of the philosophical affiliations of Jeon Woo, Yu Jung-Gyo, and Kim Pyeong-Mook because they are all Neo-Confucian scholars of the Yulgok’s gi/qi school. Yu takes a balanced stance in his explanation of the moral mind. He understood the mind primarily as a system of psychological activities and processes with its ingenious moral abilities. In its activity, the mind is driven by the variable efficacy of gi/qi, but it can become virtuous and achieve brilliant wisdom by following the moral order of i/li. Therefore, one cannot understand the mind simply by characterizing it as i/li without recognizing the psychological activity and efficacy of gi/qi. Because of this, Yu is concerned that Yi Hang-Ro’s i/li theory of the mind can invite misunderstandings and criticisms such as Jeon Woo’s and is motivated to defend and supplement Yi’s view by arguing that the mind is basically run by gi/qi, but it also represents the normative order of i/li in its virtue and wisdom.

Against Yu’s somewhat moderate interpretation of Yi’s view, Kim takes a strong normative approach to Yi’s thesis. Kim does not believe that Yi’s thesis needs any major supplementation or modification, as Yu suggests. Yi knows, according to Kim, that the mind is an interactive combination of i/li and gi/qi, and its activity derives from the efficacy of gi/qi. However, Yi’s intention is that if one wants to understand its essential and intrinsic moral nature, the mind should be understood from the perspective of i/li. Simply attending to its psychological activities is not sufficient in explaining the moral nature of the mind, i.e., the mind’s ability to recognize moral values, duties, follow moral norms, and cultivate moral virtues. From the perspective of Kim’s interpretation, the best way to understand Yi’s thesis is to take a full, uncompromised normative approach to the mind, whether the mind is gi/qi or the combination of i/li and gi/qi. Therefore, the same type of philosophical conflict is observed in the Simseoil Debate as in the Four-Seven Debate and the Horak Debate.

I/LI, GI/QI, AND BEYOND: MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF KOREAN NEO-CONFUCIANISM

One may argue that the conflict between the two approaches is basically the same conflict between the i/li philosophy (i.e., the philosophy of the i/li school or the Toegye school) and gi/qi philosophy (i.e., the philosophy of
the gi/qi school and the Yulgok). In fact, a modern Japanese scholar Tōru Takahashi (高橋亨, 1878–1967) explained the history of Korean Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon Dynasty from the perspective of the conflict between the i/li school and the gi/qi school.14 According to him, Toegye is the founder of the i/li school (主理派), Yulgok is the founder of the gi/qi school (主氣派), and this distinction is associated with the two major political parties in the Joseon Dynasty. The i/li school is affiliated with the Eastern Party (Dong In 東人) and the gi/qi school is affiliated with the Western Party (Seo In 西人) in the Joseon politics.

Although Takahashi’s is one of the popular interpretations of Korean Neo-Confucianism, it does not provide a consistent and coherent explanation of the philosophical conflicts in the major debates in the Joseon Dynasty. First, the Four-Seven Debate is not a debate between the i/li philosophy and the gi/qi philosophy. Yulgok, for example, stresses the role played by gi/qi in the arousal of emotions (i.e., all emotions are aroused by the efficacy of gi/qi), but he does not say that gi/qi is exclusively necessary or important in emotions. Instead, he believes that everything is a combination of i/li and gi/qi. He states that “[i]t is a mistake to conclude that filthy things do not have principle [i/li].”

Second, it is important to point out that the Horak Debate and the Simseol Debate took place within the gi/qi school in Yulgok’s philosophical lineage. That is, the philosophical conflicts in these debates cannot be explained simply by the conflict between the i/li-ism and the gi/qi-ism.

Third, in the Simseol Debate, Yu Jung-Gyo and Kim Pyeong-Mook developed different interpretations of Yi Hang-Ro’s thesis that the mind is i/li. If Takahashi’s interpretation of Korean Neo-Confucianism is right, how can Yi Hang-Ro, the founder of the Hwa Seo School and one of the major Neo-Confucian philosophers in the Yulgok’s philosophical lineage of gi/qi philosophy, talk about the i/li of the mind in a serious philosophical manner, and how can Yu and Kim from the perspective of the gi/qi philosophy discuss the different interpretations of Yi’s i/li-ism? Therefore, Takahashi’s distinction and his explanation of the conflict between the i/li philosophy and the gi/qi philosophy are not fully applicable to the philosophical conflict developed in the Simseol Debate, where the philosophers in the gi/qi school seriously explored and pursued the nature of the mind through i/li. Given that Korean Neo-Confucians concentrated on the philosophical analysis of the moral mind and the same pattern of philosophical conflict is observed in the three major debates, it is important to understand Korean Neo-Confucianism from the perspective of the normative and psychological approaches to the mind regardless of Korean Neo-Confucians’ affiliation with or support of the i/li or the gi/qi philosophy. For these reasons, I argue that Korean Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon Dynasty is a philosophical tradition of moral psychology, the central debates of which revolve around the distinction and tension between the normative and psychological approaches that provide contrastive explanations of the moral mind. If the former is devoted to the “moral” psychology, the latter is devoted to the moral “psychology” of Neo-Confucianism.

In the context of contemporary moral theories, stimulating philosophical implications can be drawn from Korean Neo-Confucianism. First, seen from the conflict between the normative and psychological approaches, one can understand the major debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism as the conflict between moral psychological foundationalism (the view that the normative standard of goodness is founded upon the pure and constant nature of the mind) and moral psychological constructivism (the view that the normative standard of morality emerges from the intentional and effortful processes of the moral development and cultivation of the mind). The former explains the moral mind on the basis of the intrinsic or innate moral abilities (such as the intrinsic moral traits of the four emotions [sadan 四端] that Toegye focuses on in the Four-Seven Debate), but the latter highlights the developmental processes of the mind to recognize and secure moral norms (such as the effortful moral practice [yeokhaeng 刑行] that Yulgok discusses in his moral philosophy). The former is comparable to moral faculty theory or moral nativism, but the latter is related to various theories of moral development.

Second, one can also understand Korean Neo-Confucianism as an attempt to integrate the conflict between the two major paradigms of moral psychology: Kantian and Humean theories of the moral mind and agency. On the one hand, many Korean Neo-Confucians believe that moral will and autonomous moral agency reside in the ingenious or enlightening moral abilities of the mind, which seems to follow Kantian moral philosophy. On the other hand, they also believe that our naturally aroused feelings and concerns for others’ well-being are the foundation of our moral sense, which seems to follow Humean moral sentimentalism. The question is how to combine or integrate the view that moral goodness exists in the mind independently of the variable psychological inclinations and the view that moral goodness emerges from the naturally arising other-caring inclinations of the mind. Although philosophical debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism are not perfectly aligned with the contrastive orientations of Kantian deontology and Humean sentimentalism, and Korean Neo-Confucian philosophers are not fully successful in solving or resolving their conflicts, philosophical debates in the Joseon Dynasty provide a stimulating opportunity to explore and analyze the relation between the deontological and sentimentalist explanations of moral consciousness and agency.

Third, from the perspective of moral cognition, the philosophical debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism can be compared to the two contrastive processes, i.e., the modular and non-modular processes of moral cognition. When good, evil, virtues, and vices are perceived, and moral judgments are made, the mind goes through particular cognitive processes. If moral cognition is served by dedicated processes that are specialized in recognizing and distinguishing moral categories and exemplars (as the hobal [differential causation] theory of Toegye suggests), the mind becomes a modular system of moral cognition. If moral cognition is served by general (i.e., non-specific) processes of perception and judgment (as the gongbal [common causation] theory of Kobong suggests), the mind becomes a non-modular system of moral cognition.
In this comparative interpretation, the normative and psychological approaches in Korean Neo-Confucianism can be comparable to the modular and non-modular views of moral cognition, respectively. Although this type of comparative projection of Korean Neo-Confucianism to contemporary theories of philosophy and cognitive science seems a bit anachronistic, it may stimulate inspiring interpretations of Korean Neo-Confucianism and highlight its unique philosophical contribution to our understanding of the mind, morality, and emotions.

NOTES
1. For detailed discussions of the Four-Seven Debate and its philosophical implications, see Edward Chung, The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Toegye and Yi Yulgok; Philip J. Ivanhoe, "The Historical Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Four-Seven Debate"; Xi-De Jin, "The Four-Seven Debate and the School of Principle in Korea"; Jieeloo Liu, "A Contemporary Assessment of the Four-Seven Debate"; Bongrae Seok, "Moral Metaphysics and Moral Psychology of Korean Neo-Confucianism." Michael C. Kalton et al., The Four-Seven Debate, 11.

2. Kalton et al., The Four-Seven Debate, 32.

3. Kalton et al., The Four-Seven Debate, 131.

4. Kobong, for example, states that "[i]t's just that principle [i/i] is weak while material force [g/i] is strong." Kalton et al., The Four-Seven Debate, 6.


6. Wonjin Han, Nam Dang Jip, Book 11.


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The Korean Ritual Debate and Its Contemporary Relevance

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ABSTRACT

The Korean Ritual Debate is one of three major scholarly debates during the Joseon Dynasty that had a great impact on a variety of aspects of Korean Neo-Confucianism. Despite its significance, of the three debates, the Ritual Debate has received the least philosophical attention, due largely to the political aspects of Confucian ritual propriety, which turned the debate into the basis for purges and executions. Another barrier to accessing the Ritual Debate is its extremely complex nature. In order to discern the true contours of the debate, one needs not only to follow the complicated arguments it generated but also to understand their implicit philosophical meanings and implications within the history of Korean Neo-Confucian philosophy. Drawing upon recent scholarship that sheds helpful light upon these complex issues, this paper aims to introduce the debate and some of the philosophical issues that arose in the course of its development that are relevant to contemporary philosophical discussions of morality.

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Korean Neo-Confucianism during the Joseon Dynasty 朝鮮 (1392–1910), there are three major debates: the Four-Seven Debate, the Horak Debate, and the Ritual Debate. The first two debates have been introduced to the English-speaking world, but the last, the Ritual Debate, has received very little philosophical attention. Recently, more scholars have conducted research focusing on its political nature and implications. This paper aims to introduce the debate and briefly analyze its main points, how it proceeded, and its consequences—focusing on its philosophical meanings and its implications for contemporary times.
WHAT IS THE KOREAN RITUAL DEBATE?
The Korean Ritual Debate occurred over a period of several decades, beginning in 1659. It initially concerned how the Queen Dowager Jau (Jau daebi 孝懿大妃, 1624–1688; posthumous name Jangnyeol wanghu 舊愍王后) should mourn the deceased king, King Hyojong (孝宗, r. 1649–1659), her stepson. This seemingly simple question reveals, in part, its complicated nature. The issue at the heart of the debate drew forth a series of opinions from a wide range of people in the country and resulted in profound changes in the ruling faction of the time. Because of the consequent effects these changes had on later periods, this issue became the most debated problem in Korean history and one of the three major debates of Korean Confucian philosophy.

Let us set the stage for the debate. In 1659, King Hyojong passed away. During the Joseon Dynasty, a stepmother was obligated to mourn her husband’s legitimate children as her own. The Queen Dowager Jau was a second wife of King Injo (仁祖, r. 1623–1649) and King Hyojong was by birth the king’s second son, who succeeded his father after his elder brother, the eldest son of King Injo, Crown Prince Sohyeon (昭顯世子, 1612–1645) had died. This state of affairs was not ordinary and lacked any exact precedent; it thus called for the application of an altered rite. Song Siyeol (宋時烈, 1607–1689; pen name Uam 尤庵), a respected scholar-official and a ritual master of the Westerners (Seoin 西人) faction, argued for one year of mourning wearing trimmed sackcloth and carrying a staff (jachoe janggi 斋衰杖朞), the rites appropriate for a younger son. Two scholars of the Southerners (Namin 南人) faction, Heo Mok (許穆, 1595–1682) and Yun Huy (尹煥, 1617–1680), had different opinions, offering different justifications. Heo Mok argued for three years of mourning wearing trimmed sackcloth, treating the deceased king as the king’s eldest son. Yun Huy advocated that she should mourn him for three years in untrimmed clothes (chamchoe 斩衰), the highest form of mourning, as he was her sovereign.

Two fundamentally different views divided these three scholars’ opinions. First, should we apply a different principle for the royal house, regarding political status as taking precedence over the familial relationship? Second, when an eldest son dies and the second son succeeds the descent-line, how should the successor be recognized: as a next eldest son (cha jangja 次長子) or a second son (cha jaya 次子)? Both Song and Heo followed filial familial rank as their primary criterion while Yun argued for the exclusivity of the royal family. Song and Heo bore different views on the position of the king and differed in their interpretations of commentaries on the ritual text, the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonies (Uirye 儀禮), regarding the four exceptional cases that included interpretations of the characters, *eldest son* 長子 and *illegitimate son* 庶子. Song Siyeol pointed out that if we were to follow the exceptions covered, King Hyojong should be considered as “(having) substance but not right” (體而不正), and this principle was potentially explosive, because the son of Crown Prince Sohyeon was still alive and this would affect his right of succession. After a series of debates, a final decision was agreed upon, with Song Siyeol’s opinion being declared the consensus view. Yet, the exact role and position of the deceased king remained ambiguous because the decision was officially made on the basis of the National Code (Gyeongguk daejeon 經國大典), which prescribed one year of mourning for all sons by a mother.

In 1674, the unresolved ambiguity at the heart of the previous debate resurfaced when Queen Inseon (仁宣王后, 1618–1674), the widow of King Hyojong, died. Since the status of a woman followed her husband’s familial and social positions, questions arose as to how the Queen Dowager Jau should conduct mourning for her daughter-in-law. However, the second debate did not retain quite the same ambiguity as the first because, according to the National Code, a surviving mother’s mourning for the first legitimate son and other legitimate sons differs. The Westerners remained consistent with their previous position, seeing King Hyojong as the second son; therefore, they argued that the Queen Dowager should mourn Queen Inseon for nine months as the wife of one of his non-eldest legitimate sons (jungja 衆子). This made it clearer that the previous decision regarded King Hyojong as a second son. Do Sinjing (都慎徵, 1604–1678), a Southerner scholar, submitted a memorial, pointing out the inconsistencies in the previous debate and argued for one-year mourning as the wife of the eldest son. The new king, King Hyeonjong (顯宗, r. 1659–1674), realized the discrepancies and their implications. Feeling betrayed and sensing that the legitimacy of his throne was endangered, the king ordered a thorough re-examination of the first debate. The detailed processes and arguments that were involved in this re-examination are beyond the scope of our contemporary interests and this essay. Let it suffice to say that the Southerners, who advocated that the king’s sovereign position should be regarded as taking precedence over his filial rank, won the debates. The Westerners, including Song Siyeol, were exiled for misunderstanding the issue and misleading the ruler.

EVALUATION OF THE RITUAL DEBATE
To most modern eyes, the Ritual Debate may seem overheated and a purely doctrinal dispute of historical interest but with little or no significant contemporary value. Some have dismissed the debate as a purely factional dispute that led Joseon Neo-Confucians to neglect real problems of their place and time and instead to exert themselves in hair-splitting theoretical discussions that had little to do with improving the lives of the people of their time and especially the commoners. Some have argued that because of this kind of idiosyncratic, unrealistic, and empty argument, Korea fell behind instead of moving forward toward modernity. It is my contention that the Ritual Debate cannot and should not be understood merely as controversy over etiquette or manners or as simply a power struggle. There are deeper reasons motivating the debate, and these have insights to offer to contemporary philosophers interested in ethics, social practices, and the relationship between these two.

To gain a more complete and accurate grasp of the Ritual Debate, it is crucial to recognize the ideological foundation of the Joseon Dynasty and its unique development of Neo-Confucian philosophy. The Joseon was explicitly established based on Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian philosophy. At least in terms of the ideology of
the ruling class, it was a country led by philosophers—a fact that might have pleased Plato. Moreover, Joseon Neo-Confucian scholar-officials did not just discuss philosophy. They formulated policies and governed, and their political and social institutions were codified in a set of rituals; they ruled by ritual (yechi 禮治). Since rituals both granted obligations and powers to government officials and limited their individual roles and prerogatives, ritual functioned as a form of "constitutionalism" and offered a means to engage in "practical reasoning [concerning] the theoretical conundrum of the throne." 

The social and moral order that Neo-Confucians had carefully constructed collapsed as a result of two major invasions: one by Japan (1592 and 1598) and another by the Manchus (1627 and 1636). Internationally, during this period, the Great Ming Dynasty (大明, 1368-1644) fell and the barbarian Qing Dynasty (滿, 1644-1912) was established. This marked not only political regime change but also a great threat to the whole of Confucian civilization. Facing the acute need to redraw the boundary between civilization and barbarity while symbolically constructing Korea's position as the smaller new center of Confucian civilization, Korean Neo-Confucians sought for ways to restore or rebuild a new order and episteme based on ritual propriety. This new reconstruction cannot be understood apart from Korea's unique development of a set of questions that moved Korean Neo-Confucianism to another level of sophistication. The following brief description of main arguments and key terms will crystalize how the Ritual Debate was connected to their metaphysical views.

The former ruler, King Injo, had violated the agnicative principle (e.g., 宗法) and passed his throne to his second legitimate son instead of his living grandson, the son of the eldest legitimate son, Crown Prince Sohyeon. This is against what is prescribed according to the correct rite (jeongnye 正禮), and the death of King Hyojong unavoidably revealed the king's filial rank according to the principle. Scholar-officials had different interpretations of this situation concerning the altered rite (byeonye 變禮). On the one hand, they argued what would be correct, and on another, what the textual evidence supports in light of the theory of the "rectification of names." 

One of the big differences between them was whether they agreed with the "universal application of ritual" (天下同禮) or recognized the exceptionalism of the royal family (王者禮不同士庶). The former stance implies that there is one governing principle for all people, the agnicative principle, and parent-children relationships override all other relationships, meaning that a mother cannot be considered as a sovereign because the parent-child relationship is a heaven-endowed natural principle. The latter stresses the ruler's unique position as a ruler and parent for all people and argues that the ruler's natural filial rank must be altered to ensure he would be mourned with the utmost honor. In light of these concerns, we can already appreciate the extent to which apparent scholastic hair-splitting about what is the proper mourning rite actually directly concerns and affects moral and political issues of the highest order. Although it is debatable whether Song, Heo, and Yun's fundamental metaphysical views differ, it seems clear that their views on ritual are strongly influenced by aspects of their metaphorical views. Their unprecedentedly strong belief in the unity of all under heaven and pattern-principles as the underlying principle, and the feeling of urgency to protect and maintain the one single line of agnicative lineage as a way to preserve or restore a permanent harmonious order, cannot be explained without taking into account their philosophical beliefs as Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian philosopher-officials in seventeenth-century Korea. For example, the key terms Song Siyeol used demonstrate this kind of metaphysical connection clearly: the universality of the patrilineal descent-line, "not wearing three-year untrimmed mourning twice" (buricham 不二斬) and "no two right lines" (muqiong 無二綱). There should be only a single right descent-line, and this principle is externalized by following the utmost form of mourning: three years in untrimmed attire, only once. The "two" represent "multiplicity" and the "right line" (tong 綱) and "three-year mourning in untrimmed attire" (斬) are external forms of pattern-principle. Song had a strong belief in "ultimate oneness" in all its forms and expressions, and this faith reflects the Neo-Confucian belief in there being "one pattern-principle with many manifestations" (理一分殊).

All three thinkers believed in the oneness of the agnicative line as a symbolic representation of this cosmic order. But their understanding of "three-year mourning in untrimmed attire" varied. Since King Injo, the father of King Hyojong, mourned his eldest son, Crown Prince Sohyeon, for three years in untrimmed attire, this ultimate expression should not be repeated, Song argued. Heo Mok and Yun Hyu disagreed with Song Siyeol on this matter but offered different reasons and textual support. While Heo still considered King Hyojong's familial position as the second eldest son, who is entitled to the "three-year mourning in trimmed attire," Yun insisted that the Queen Dowager should mourn the deceased king's son as her sovereign (sinmoseol 臣母說) based on "亂臣十人." Yun's view was criticized as being against Confucian ideas and was rejected by most of his contemporaries, including members of the Southerners faction to which he himself belonged. A parent-child relationship and family are natural human relationships that constitute the core of Confucianism. When one's political obligation and familial duty clash, the Confucian solution is to choose familial duty. For Song, Heo, and other contemporary Neo-Confucians, treating one's parent as a subject was unacceptable.

Yet, the agnicative principle was more than a natural principle of blood relationship between biological father and son. The principle was designed by human beings with other accompanying rules to ensure its structure and maintenance against all potential natural failures (e.g., the eldest son not being able to produce a son). The unchanging descent-line was organized and based not only on the principle of "keeping close those who are close" (chinchin 親親) but also on "honoring those who are honorable (jonjon 尊尊)." The principle was not in force between a father and all his sons, but only his eldest son from a legitimate wife. Biological children were discriminated by their gender and birth order, matters in which they had no
choice. Children were organized in a hierarchical order; one was more honorable than another. Human emotions or disposition (人情) were regulated by ritual prescription (禮制). What would be a standard rite and what would be an altered rite were designated either by the ancient sages (e.g., ritual classics such as the Book of Rites) or by the worthies and great masters (e.g., commentaries and ritual manuals by Zhu Xi). But these ritual principles cannot be blindly applied and must be considered within the given time and space. A true Confucian scholar-official who has the knowledge, experience, respectful status, and rank can understand what pattern-principle is and when and how it can be applied universally, as well as what can be distinguished or discriminated, leading to a complex and delicate balance. In other words, whose view determined what was right implied the person’s proximity to sagehood; those with such knowledge and wisdom had clear warrants for being granted and remaining in political power so that they could assist a ruler.

**CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS**

The seventeenth-century Korean Ritual Debate presents two important lessons that are relevant to people in modern society. First, the debate reminds us of the philosophical significance of ritual or ritual propriety for Confucians, especially Cheng-Zhu orthodox Neo-Confucians. Unlike Chinese Neo-Confucians, for whom court politics and local voluntarism were never combined, seventeen-century Korean Confucians offer examples in which these two were inextricably combined based on their theoretical and academic development and full understanding of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian framework. Within different historical and sociopolitical circumstances, the matter of “how should the Queen Dowager mourn her deceased step-son king” had further moral and philosophical implications. In addition to the issues that were raised earlier, the Korean Ritual Debate shows that there are “gaps” between the metaphysics and ethics of Confucianism and its application in reality, and that these gaps are extremely complex and difficult to understand and require delicate negotiation. The gaps might appear simple and easy to cut or eliminate from the perspective of a modern academic philosopher, but if one is committed to or interested in Confucianism as a way of life, the gaps bear more weight and call for rigorous philosophical contemplation. For example, Confucian mourning rituals reveal their views on death and the relationship between the dead and the living, and confirm and reorganize the positions of the surviving living people. For those who wish to fully understand the views involved or reform contemporary mourning rituals, the Korean Ritual Debate offers a full, detailed, and nuanced picture of the conceptual and practical landscape one must navigate.

Second, the Korean Ritual Debate helps us understand issues related to women and gender in Confucian philosophy. The Ritual Debate was a turning point in the dissemination of the agnatic principle. As a result, an agnostic consciousness spread across the country, even reaching to and affecting local Confucians. Throughout more than two decades (from 1659 to 1679) of the debate, not only scholar-officials in the court but also students at the National Confucian Academy, as well as private scholars and students in local communities, participated. Even the reigning kings, who normally relied on and deferred to the decisions of counselors and scholar-officials, started to look into the specifics of ritual texts, scrutinized their implicit and explicit meanings, and at times actively joined the debate. This wide involvement heightened people’s agnatic consciousness and sharpened its practice, and the sociopolitical consequences influenced people’s thought and everyday life. Despite the tremendous changes in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Korea, one sees the strong and persistent influence of patrilineal thought and practice in Korean society.

The most recent studies of the Korean Ritual Debate have revealed issues related to women and gender. Ha Yeoju has explored the debates from the perspective of Queen Dowager Jau. Queen Dowager Jau was the one whose mourning attire was the central object of concern in all these debates, but she had hardly received any scholarly attention. Ha Yeoju also brings our attention to the fact that the Queen Dowager contributed to the expansion of (royal) women’s ritual participation in terms of physical space. This historical insight calls for philosophical analysis. In my research on Song Siyeol’s views on rituals for women and their philosophical meanings, I argued that the Korean Ritual Debate “signifies the momentum of the actualization of patrilineal succession, the Confucian ideal succession, in reality in a fuller shape” and that Song’s views on the debate demonstrate how he reinforced the right of the descent-line and spread of patrilineal consciousness. By presenting topics and textual evidence focusing on women and gender, the Korean Ritual Debate and Korean Neo-Confucian theorization offer one way to understand the “rules of exclusion, its negativities, [and] the ways in which it coerced people in their everyday life.” We might ask what a feminist reformation of mourning rituals would look like. Can feminist reform coexist with the ideal of oneness based on the traditional pattern-principle or should it accommodate multiplicity? In order to further explore these topics, I plan to examine Korean women Neo-Confucians who knew (understood) ritual.

**CONCLUSION**

To pursue oneness with “varieties of moral possibility,” one needs imagination drawn from our cultural reservoirs concerning the nature of persons and the nature of reality. Some Western philosophers are interested in “rehabilitat[ing] the cosmic dimension of ritual,” seeing “ritual activities as embodying metaphysics.” Yet, some Confucian philosophers try to see ritual apart from its metaphysical foundation. Interpreting ritual apart from its metaphysics may be possible and valuable, but the danger is that “in so doing, one is abstracting the actions from the context that provides their justification as wisdom.” In the case of Confucianism, “if there is no basis for talking about rituals that support true visions of authentically good human lives and people who are moved by such rituals to sincerely embody such ideals,” it cannot be called ritual.

Robert Neville argues that contemporary challenges posed, for example, by scientific understandings of the human, practices of global philosophy, and contemporary political and moral developments call for greater understanding
of East Asian approaches to ritual. Though his focus was Chinese philosophy, I believe Confucianism, especially Korean Neo-Confucian philosophy exemplified through the seventeenth-century Ritual Debate, can and will respond to this urgent call. The debate allows us to see how and why ritual is crucial for Confucian philosophers, providing a fuller picture of ritual development—its contents, process, and potential tension yet unforeseen development—in specific historical and sociocultural circumstances, and revealing its moral and political significance as well as its gendered characteristics in actualizing their metaphysical and ethical philosophy into ritual practices.

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NOTES

1. Throughout the paper, I follow Revised Romanization used by the Korean government. For those papers in Korean that provide an English abstract, I keep their original Romanization of titles and names to help readers who might want to search further.

2. See, for example, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Three Streams: Confucian Reflections on Learning and the Moral Heart-Mind in Korea, China, and Japan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), chs. 4-5.


5. Kim Hyun Soo points out that, despite its benefits, the term yechi poses difficulties for understanding and examining the meaning and role of ritual in Confucianism. Instead, he suggests using yeugo (禮教), for it is the term used in the Confucian texts, especially Joseon texts, and can capture not only the political and ideal but also the moral and practical aspects. See Kim Hyun Soo, “17-segi Joseon ui yeugo sansang yeongu” 17世紀朝鮮的禮敎思想研究 [A Study of Confucian Ritualism’s Thoughts in 17th-Century Choson Dynasty] (PhD diss., Sungkyunkwan University, 2007), 1–9.


13. For example, Analects 8.20.


15. Analects 13.18 and Mencius 7A35.

16. Lee Bong Gyu and Choi Jinseok see these two principles of human relationship, vertical and horizontal, as fundamental concepts required to understand the philosophical meanings of the ritual debates. Lee Bong Gyu, “Joseon hugi yeong-geun yeong-geun 조선 후기 예학삼상 예학삼상 [A Study of Propriety Thoughts of Confucian Ritual in Central and Honam Schools in Choson Dynasty] (PhD diss., Sungkyunkwan University, 1996), 173–74.

17. Peter Kees Bol, Neo-Confucianism in History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center / Harvard University Press, 2008), 277.


19. This engagement by students and private scholars and students marks their first en masse engagement in national discourse. See Haboush, “Constructing the Center,” 60–61.

20. For example, it was only in 2021 that a Confucian academy, the Museong Seowon, in Korea, allowed a woman to preside over a ceremony in its more than three-hundred-year history. See Anthony Kuhn, “A Woman Takes a Lead Role in Confucian Ceremonies, Breaking a New Path in South Korea,” NPR News (October 19, 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/10/19/1045999366/women-equality-south-korea-confucian-ceremony-confucianism.


The aim of this essay is to defend the ideology against uncharitable criticisms. My intention isn’t to justify the regime’s reprehensible practices, including its human rights violations. At the same time, failing to or refusing to understand Juche with the philosophical resources we have is not only intellectually dishonest but also politically inexpedient. Though it’s possible that the ideology truly is a sham, or that epistemological barriers will hinder us from seeing its merits and demerits in a clearer way. The rest of the section, I’ll give more context for Juche, tracing its origins and its main tenets. I’ll then turn to Alzo David-West’s criticisms of Juche and offer ways of interpreting Juche that alleviate his worries. My hope is that presenting North Korea’s ideology in a more charitable way will help us see its merits and demerits in a clearer way.

Juche, usually translated as “self-reliance,” holds up political independence, economic self-sufficiency, and military self-reliance as the ideals of the state. Victor Cha, a former national foreign policy advisor, identifies the following tenets as the core of Juche:

1. Man is the master of his fate.
2. The master of the Revolution is the people.
3. The Revolution must be pursued in a self-reliant manner.
4. The key to the Revolution is loyalty to the supreme leader, Kim Il-sung.

Experts disagree whether Juche is a “real philosophy or not,” some arguing that it is an outward-facing ideology that doesn’t inform the everyday decision of the regime. Nevertheless, most scholars believe Juche to be important to the regime’s self-conception. Some note that the literal translation of “juche” is “subject,” a key concept in Marxism and in philosophy in general. Understanding the word to pick out an agential subject would be fitting given the context in which the term is believed to have been introduced. In a 1955 speech titled “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work,” Kim Il-sung had brought up juche to encourage Koreans to prioritize one’s identity as a Korean and, as a Korean, to prioritize Korean national interests. A historical view of the peninsula also contextualizes North Korea’s desire for self-reliance and explains why the notion of juche qua subjectivity was spelled out in an overtly nationalistic way. The conventional understanding, shared among North and South Koreans, is that Korea has had to assume a defensive stance against powerful neighbors for millennia—and Kim Il-sung highlighted the fact Korea was exploited whenever it was dependent on nearby powerful nations, historically China, then Japan during the occupation.

Juche formed a natural connection to anti-imperial culture in Korea. By the 1920s, communism was a major philosophical influence on anticOLONIALISM, and the first domestic Korean communist party was established in Seoul in 1925. Socialism and Marxism, as critiques of both imperialism and capitalism, were seen as modern ideologies, and...
Juche inherited its buzzwords, such as “revolution,” “social movement,” “liberation,” and “class struggle.”

Juche was heavily influenced by Marxism-Leninism, with Kim Il-sung himself having called Juche “Korean-style socialism.” Until the early 1970s, North Korea openly acknowledged her ideological influences. Juche’s ideological origins were widely understood to be Marxism-Leninism (Markseu Renin Juui), and state-organized parades included oversized portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. See, for instance, Figure 1 from Pyeongyang in 1946, where Kim Il-sung’s portrait only appears after the aforementioned figures (as if to signal his continuation of their legacy).

From the early 1970s, however, references to Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin slowly disappeared, and North Korea began to promulgate Juche as “the singular ideological system” (yuilssasang chegye). Juche was formally adopted as the sole guiding principle of the state at the Fifth Party Congress in 1970, and by 2009, all references to communism were removed from the North Korean Constitution.

Despite being a Marxist offshoot, Juche’s strong nationalistic underpinning set it apart from socialism and Marxism from the beginning. What made North Korea’s socialist thought different from the Chinese and Soviet applications was the incorporation of national feelings and macro-historical narratives. Juche also departs from Marxism-Leninism in its privileging of the state over the workers; Juche is all about the Korean state, Korean identity, and Korean independence, not the working class or the individuals who make up the proletariat. (It has this in common with other anticolonial Marxist-Leninist thought in Asia and in Africa.) Kim Jong-il said in a speech titled “Let Us Highly Display the Korean-Nation-First Spirit” that a “Korean-nation-first spirit” was needed to protect the “time-honoured history of five thousand years, a refined culture and tradition.” Juche was introduced as a way to “decolonize the Korean mind” so Koreans could emerge as “masters of their own destiny.” Kim Il-sung encouraged independence and creativity in problem-solving, and he rejected a dogmatic application of Marxism and Leninism, arguing that a European/Soviet philosophy wouldn’t apply to postcolonial Korea. Koreans were to work out their own philosophy and carry out their own revolution, Juche being the resultant “Korean-style socialism.” Workers are empowered only insofar as they form a part of the larger collective worth defending, namely, the state and race/ethnicity.

Juche is also notable in its de-emphasis of historical materialism, the view that history is driven by economic arrangements and the sociopolitical relationships that are built around modes of production. Juche’s “mentality” highlights humans’ mental activity as the central driving force of history. As such, Juche emphasizes the importance of a strong will to bring about the future one would like to see. Leaning into the “mind over matter” motto, Juche thinks that an agent’s decision is ultimately independent from external factors. The Juche age, Kim Jong-il writes, “is a new historical era when the popular masses have emerged as masters of the world.” Marx, Engels, and Lenin all talk about a kind of proletariat “dictatorship” after bourgeois control of the state, and Juche puts a national and mental spin on the new agency. The Juche system’s prioritization of the mental aspects of what makes a person revolutionary is a mutation from dialectical materialism, the view that all aspects of society are interconnected and that its organizing principle is structured around modes of production. Juche highlights the agent’s sheer efforts as the prime mover of history, but unlike other can-do philosophies, Juche specifies that citizens can forge their own path by remaining loyal to the leader who will resist external threats and usher in the “final phase of human development,” manifested in the unification of the peninsula.

To wrap up, Juche was initially conceived as a Korean extension of Marxism-Leninism, but its nationalist undertone and mentalism set it apart from other applications of Marxist-Leninist thought. (The cult of personality is also considered a factor that separates Juche from Marxism-Leninism, but I’ll save that discussion for a later occasion given space constraints.) Having provided a brief summary of the major characteristics of the Juche ideology, I’ll turn next to David-West’s assessment.

II. RESPONSES TO DAVID-WEST ON JUCHE

In “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything: Deconstructing the North Korean Juche Axiom,” David-West concludes Juche to be “non-philosophical and in fact nonsensical, being neither humanist nor materialist nor rationalist in conceptual substance.” He complains about nonspecialists in philosophy having made inadequate claims about Juche, though his own nonspecialist status doesn’t dissuade him from reaching uncharitable conclusions about the philosophy. I’m not sure how robust or systematic we will find Juche to be as a philosophy after sustained analysis, but I’ll show that David-West’s philosophical worries can be adequately addressed. The etymology of “to respect” points us to “re” and “specere”—to respect is to look/see again, and I’d like to respect...
Juche in this sense. Andrei Lankov writes that North Korea is a "surprisingly sane place," and I'll channel this spirit to see how Juche might be defended against David-West's allegations. Below, I organize David-West's criticisms into two major strands and offer responses to each.

**JUCHE'S AXIOM IS TOO ABSTRACT AND DEMONSTRABLY FALSE**

David-West dubs Juche as "national subjectivism" but says it's really a kind of subjective idealism, a metaphysical view that what we take the world to be is inextricably tied to our subjective projections and observations. He takes "man is the master of everything and decides everything" as the distilled axiom of Juche, and he performs a surprisingly literal reading of the slogan to criticize Juche. For instance, he writes the following:

> The Juche axiom, to be sure, inverts the principle that the whole is greater than its parts. Logically and naturalistically, man is a part of everything. . . . A part is not greater than the whole.\(^{15}\)

> Of course, among the fundamental distinctions between human beings and atoms is that humans are conscious agents, determined nevertheless by their material, historical, and social conditions of life. . . . Practical cognition does not, however, put human beings in a position to conquer the laws of nature at any level.\(^{25}\)

But a more reasonable interpretation of Juche wouldn't entail blatant mereological embarrassments or commit Juche to be saying that humans can overcome any and all laws of nature.

To illustrate by analogy, let me take a line from the American Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." If taken in David-West's literalist spirit, we might think: clearly, not all men are created equal; humans have different heights, parents, and abilities, to name just a few disparities. But this line of questioning is crude and hardly worth our time. Putting aside questions about the Founding Fathers' inconsistent applications of these ideas, retorting to the declaration by commenting, "but obviously people aren't all equal!" is silly at best—and I think this is analogous to how David-West approaches the Juche axiom.

There's a need to carefully interpret what each of the words "man," "decides," and "everything" means, and attention to the context and aim of the utterance helps us arrive at an interpretation that doesn't relegate the axiom to nonsense.

David-West also complains that "the abstract and one-sided construction of the axiom renders it insufficient" to properly account for all the philosophical questions that rise from the statement.\(^{27}\) But any slogan will come up insufficient in this regard. Consider the line from the Declaration of Independence again. What does it mean for a truth to be "self-evident"? If a truth is self-evident, why did the Founding Fathers have to declare it? What does it mean for a right to be unalienable? Aren't people robbed of life, liberty, and the chance to pursue happiness all the time? What constitutes happiness? Are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness abstractly existing entities to which all humans are entitled? What grounds this entitlement, and under what conditions can they be revoked? Again, the fact that the slogan itself is insufficient to answer all further philosophical questions that rise from it is not a reason to doubt the meaningfulness of the thoughts expressed by it. Sometimes, a claim is philosophically valuable precisely because of the further questions it raises, some unanswerable with the initial claim alone.

Insofar as Juche is first and foremost a political philosophy—after all, it takes political independence, economic self-sufficiency, and military self-reliance as applications of Juche—I don't think it would be productive to read metaphysical commitments from it. But even if we were to take Juche as a kind of idealism, there is a reading available that allows us to interpret Juche in a coherent light.

Taken at face value, David-West believes that the maxim "man is the master of everything and decides everything" "resembles a metaphysical and thus nonsensical first principle that must be accepted on faith," a thought that is "not a philosophy or method, but a dogma."\(^{28}\) However, terms like "everything" need to be taken in context. If I were looking for a particular grocery item and commenting that I looked everywhere to no avail, context would determine that I must have looked at all the eligible stores within a reasonable distance. It would be inappropriate to take "everywhere" literally to mean that I had searched the entire cosmos for the item. Similarly, for Juche, "master of everything and decides everything" must be understood in its appropriate context. The way we understand "everything" must be restricted to the kinds of things that humans can have mastery over, and it must be the kinds of thing that humans have deciding power over. So what domain does "everything" cover in this case?

My recommendation is to take Juche to be quantifying over social or political objects and relations. We should take the "everything" talk in Juche to apply to the sociopolitical world. If we take "everything" to be quantifying over social or political realities, then the slogan becomes a claim about humanity's ability to decide what is valuable to them, it becoming a way to express the much less controversial thesis that humans shape their communities and decide what's important to them. David-West readily applies this reading to Marxism when he writes that "[c]lassical Marxism sees that 'man has become the measure of all (societal) things,' the 'true sphere of domination' being social forms of organization."\(^{27}\) It's unclear why he's unwilling to extend the parenthetical gesture to Juche.

Some find it intuitive that all values are intrinsically dependent on humans and that humans are "masters" over all things valuable in the sense that without a subject endowing things with value, there would be no mind-independent source of value. These ideas roughly track antirealist sentiments in moral philosophy and value theory, the view that goodness isn't objective and mind-independent things "out there" to be discovered.\(^{29}\) Moral
antirealists, for instance, don’t believe that moral facts exist in some objective fashion; rather, humans construct, or otherwise agree upon, what we consider “moral” or “good.” According to this view, morality is a product of human judgment and effort and not an independently existing feature of the world. Though moral philosophers continue to debate about antirealism’s merits, the point is that existing philosophical debates lend us conceptual schemes with which to interpret Juche in a meaningful way.

**JUCHE ASSUMES TOO STARK A DISTINCTION BETWEEN “HUMAN” AND “EVERYTHING [ELSE]”**

David-West says a literal reading of the slogan puts too extreme a distinction between “man” and “everything,” not to mention the fact that cognition doesn’t endow humans with the ability to transcend the laws of nature. The Juche axiom “does not make logical and philosophical sense in face of the combination of real human subjective fallibility and the objective material forces that created the social catastrophe of the Great Famine.”

Three responses are available. First, that man is the measure of all things is an ancient idea. Second, the hierarchical understanding of the universe, with humans on top, might be coming from Confucian influences over Juche. Third, the slogan need not posit a human-vs.-everything-else binary. We’ll take these in turn.

David-West takes issue with Juche privileging “man” “to an extreme degree, making him the absolute measure of all things.” One might disagree with this claim, but it won’t do to simply dismiss the idea given its long history and varied repetition across different philosophical systems. A fragment attributed to Protagoras (c. 490–420 BCE) says that “of all things the measure is man: of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not.” Philosophers debate whether “man” here refers to individuals or abstract humanity, but the point is that the human-centric worldview is far from senseless. In ancient China, too, we get the suggestion that man “measures” all things in the sense that values originate from humans. The idea that humans “complete” the cosmos is discussed in texts like Huainanzi, and Xunzi writes that social or moral order is determined (“completed”) by human decisions (guided by the sage) even though the physical stuff of the world is created by heaven and earth. Zhuangzi maintains that conceptualization is central to the construction of “things” (wu 物), and Han Feizi takes “standards” (fa 法) to be heavily reliant on human decisions about the ordering of the world. These historical precedents show that while Juche’s claim to originality might be dubious, its core claim about humans being the standard is an intuitive one that finds expression in both ancient Greek and Chinese contexts.

Secondly, Confucianism formed the philosophical background of Korea for millennia, and the human-favoring hierarchy that David-West takes issue with might be Confucian in origin. Geir Helgesen writes that Juche inherits the Confucian picture that order and hierarchy are built into the world. The Neo-Confucians take this basic Confucian conviction and develop a robust metaphysical apparatus around order and hierarchy, arguing that an invisible force, li (理 principle), structures the world and that li is a lofter organizing force than qi (氣 vital force). In a similar way, Juche might be seen as a development of the Confucian view that a particular order or hierarchy governs the universe—and whereas Neo-Confucianism appealed to the abstract li as the source of order and deemed it the preeminent force, Juche might be putting human agency, volition, or consciousness as the decisive force that orders reality, considering it the preeminent force. Juche, then, can be seen as an attempt to adapt Marxism into the Korean context by incorporating local philosophies, “Korean-style socialism” being a kind of tradition-respecting ideology. The North Koreans “transcended Marxism-Leninism” and saw “social relations as the pivot of politics, and so they stress ideological education as the most important tool in directing social development. In this, they are in accordance with the teaching of Confucius.”

I don’t mean to suggest that Juche is unanimously considered a Confucian ideology, nor does Juche seem to see itself as such. But the Confucian influence illustrates just one possible source of Juche’s commitment to hierarchy and shows that the view isn’t so outlandish. Many systems of thought, including Confucianism, Christianity, and Mahayana Buddhism, posit metaphysical hierarchies in the way we understand the world. David-West’s complaint against Juche’s prioritizing of humans over other animals and objects, then, is not a unique complaint against Juche that undermines it.

Lastly, there’s no need to posit an essential subject-object binary in order to make sense of Juche. Humans may shape society in ways they see fit, and make decisions about what is valuable, without mistaking themselves to be somehow essentially separate from everything else. Marx’s historical realism, which argues that societies are organized around modes of production because humans must labor to subsist, takes social relations—such as the way labor power is organized—to be the driving force of history. Insofar as Marx considered human labor to be the beginning point of his theorizing, “material” included humans, and “consciousness” also included humans. There’s no need to posit a strong idea/matter or subject/object distinction in Marx’s thought, and there is no reason to read it into Juche, either.

Juche reduces the extent to which material conditions shape history, agreeing with Marx that they impact human behavior but denying that material conditions are the sole or the strongest driving force of history. Rebuilding a state that was reduced to rubbles during the Korean War, Kim Il-sung, in line with many strands of Marxism, might have thought that economic determinism—the view that economic configurations of labor and capital determine all other social and political relationships—isn’t true. People’s consciousness, including their ways of making sense of the world, was conditioned by previous societies and produced by a particular given culture. Developing a state philosophy that would speak to its people, then, needed to include a perspective that is familiar—for instance, a family-like perspective and a hierarchical perspective that Koreans would have been used to from Confucianism. With
Juche, Helgesen writes, North Koreans add to Marxism “the human being’s decisive role, in that they changed the philosophical focus from matter/idea to a new one called man/matter.” Even while Juche invokes Confucian underpinnings, it also “seems that Juche in this way brought Marxism closer to its origin, with its thesis about people creating their own society, while at the same time being a product of this society.”

In neither the case of Marxism nor Juche do we need dualistic understandings of “man” and “everything else.” It’s not as if “mind” or “consciousness” is neatly separated from “matter” or “labor conditions” in Marx’s philosophy, and similarly, “human” need not be separated from “everything” in Juche. We need not take Juche to involve “a false perception of objective reality,” which attributes “false powers to human beings with disastrous philosophical and social implications.” It’s one thing to insist on this interpretation and disagree with Juche on historical realist grounds—but we shouldn’t call Juche philosophical nonsense if there are interpretations available that would render it coherent and even consistent with other philosophical systems.

III. CONCLUSION
There’s a reason why North Korea hasn’t imploded yet, and it’s uncharitable to its leaders and citizens to think that it’s merely due to coercion or brainwashing. A better explanation is that the regime operates with a cultural logic that isn’t convincing to outsiders but compelling to insiders. Cha writes that the Juche ideology “forms the backbone of the state’s control” such that without it, the state could not survive. Insofar as Juche is the official state philosophy of North Korea, it would be politically expedient, not to mention intellectually worthwhile, to analyze it in a way that would help us make sense of its motivational force. An open-minded yet context-sensitive interpretation must precede any analysis worth taking seriously, and I hope to have begun this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
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NOTES
1. I’ll capitalize the word to refer to the ideology; when referring to the word or the concept, I won’t capitalize.
3. When Stalin died in 1953, there was no longer a natural center for socialism. North Korea now had to choose whether to politically side with China (Mao) or the Soviet Union (Khrushchev). Fearing alienating either one of them, Kim II-song decided to “go the Korean way” and develop the Korean-specific Juche ideology, maintaining ties with both China and the Soviet Union. Also, Rhee Syung-man (the South Korean president) was suggesting that communism was a break from the tradition of Korea, culturally alien and therefore a threat to the people’s national identity. So Kim II-song answered with Juche, Korean socialism. See Geir Helgesen, “Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum,” 191–92.
5. Andrei Lankov argues that Juche is simply too vague to be taken seriously and that its interpretation of its philosophy has changed countless times. According to Lankov, Juche is an empty shell, a term that includes everything the North Korean leadership considers “correct” at any given moment in time (see his “Juche: Idea for All Times”). Alzo David-West also attacks Juche on philosophical grounds, concluding that it is “non-philosophical and in fact nonsensical” (see his “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything”). B. R. Myers writes Juche exists just for foreigners, something that is to be praised but not actually studied (The Cleanest Race). Felix Abt is skeptical of this deflationary view given his lived experience there (see his A Capitalist in North Korea).
8. Sonia Ryang, Reading North Korea, 199.
9. Ryang, Reading North Korea, 199.
19. Ryang, Reading North Korea, 199.
22. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 68.
23. This etymology is mentioned in Ryang, Reading North Korea, 208.
30. See Richard Joyce, “Moral Anti-Realism.”
32. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 70.
34. Helgesen, “Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum,” 189.
35. Helgesen, “Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum,” 211.
36. See Alzo David-West, Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism, for a discussion on how the North Korean regime has responded to Confucian and Neo-Confucian historical figures depending on their latest political needs. Like Marxism-Leninism, Confucianism predated Juche in the Korean peninsula, but scholars debate the extent to which Juche can be described as Confucian. Cha argues that the ideology was effective as a source of control because it borrowed conventional Korean
notions of Confucianism; hierarchy, social harmony, and respect, which serve as bedrocks of a Confucian society, accompanied the regime's need for control (The Impossible State, 39). Though Juche seems to have inherited, at the very least, the Confucian and Neo-Confucian idea that order and hierarchy are built into the world (Helgesen, "Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum," 189), this isn't enough to call North Korea a Confucian state (Ryang, Reading North Korea, 193–94) since many philosophical systems divided the universe into hierarchical categories (think of Christianity with its God-humans-beasts hierarchy and Mahayana Buddhism with its ultimate truth-conventional truth distinction). In addition, North Korean leaders don't fit the mold of the traditional Confucian patriarch; artistic and political renderings depict the Kims as joyful, naive, spontaneous, and loving instead of scholarly or virtuous, the traits usually associated with a Confucian ruler. Kim Il-sung is described as an androgynous Parent Leader (Myers, The Cleanest Race, 48–49) and is sometimes symbolically and visually represented in feminine ways, e.g., welcoming soldiers into his bosom and featuring rosy cheeks. Ryang thinks it muddies the water to consider Juche Confucian since the crucial private father figure is missing (Reading North Korea, 192–94). The cult of personality also forms a contrast against Confucianism. Though Confucianism does encourage leaders to sway subjects with moral charisma (Analects 2.1) and encourage subjects to respect their leader, Confucian classics such as Analects and Xunzi are full of criticisms of their past and present rulers, suggesting that leaders aren't beyond reproach.

40. David-West, "‘Man is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,’" 81.
41. Ryang, Reading North Korea, 208.
42. Cha, The Impossible State, 39.

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Sudden Enlightenment: Paradigm-Shifting Awakening

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ABSTRACT
Sudden enlightenment is awakening to be attained all at once. Hyun-Eung, a Korean Buddhist monastic, has proposed a new interpretation of this claim: that sudden enlightenment is the revolutionary awakening of the dynamical and indivisible structure of cognitive subjects and objects. I argue that Hyun-Eung’s "revolutionary enlightenment" is achieved through a "paradigm shift" in Thomas Kuhn’s sense as presented in his The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Enlightenment is obtained when one’s essentialist and realist worldview is replaced, through a revolutionary change of paradigm shift, by a new perspective based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness. Prior to enlightenment, each person views herself as a separate and independent individual who has her own essence. However, when our perspective on self and the world changes with the understanding of dependent arising and emptiness, it becomes clear that no one and nothing can exist independently of conditions. Everything comes into existence, abides, and passes out of existence only in dependence on conditions. Sudden enlightenment requires a revolutionary change in one’s perspective of self and the world. I conclude that this concept of revolutionary enlightenment aptly explains the features of sudden enlightenment.

1. INTRODUCTION
The Chan tradition of East Asia teaches that enlightenment is followed by directly perceiving the truth. It also claims that enlightenment occurs suddenly and all at once rather than gradually or progressively. True enlightenment comes naturally, all of a sudden, and all at once; otherwise, it is not genuine enlightenment, or so Chan Buddhists argue. This debate on sudden and gradual enlightenment (頓悟論爭) has continued to attract much attention among East Asian Buddhists for more than a millennium.
Legend has it that the time-honored debate on sudden and gradual enlightenment started when Huineng’s verse was compared with the stanza of his contemporary Shenxiu’s in the seventh century. Huineng’s verse manifests sudden enlightenment (頓悟), and the spirit of the enlightenment is clearly illuminated in The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. First, look at Shenxiu’s verse:

The body is the Bodhi tree.
The mind is like a clear mirror.
At all times we must strive to polish it.
And must not let dust collect.

Huineng, in contrast, composed his verse as follows:

Bodhi originally has no tree,
The bright mirror is nowhere standing.
Originally there is not a thing,
Where can there be any dust?

Shenxiu’s stanza illustrates that our mind needs to be cleansed and polished so as to reveal the clear mind. Enlightenment is exposing the originally pure mind through incessant practices and efforts of removing defilements on the mind. Obviously, the enlightenment Shenxiu understands is a gradual and progressive process. A practitioner must purify her mind with an unceasing effort to attain enlightenment.

However, note that what Shenxiu’s verse tells is, ironically, very similar to a metaphor in Brahmanism, as Paul Demieville points out. Look at Svetasvatara Upanishad, a Brahmanistic scripture that uses the same metaphor, the dust-covered mirror:

Just as a dust-covered mirror
Glitters like fire when it is cleaned,
So does one who has recognized the atman’s essence
Attain the goal, deliverance from anxiety.

The verse in Upanishad illustrates that atman is identified with one’s reflection in a mirror. As a mirror is cleansed and polished, the true nature of one’s atman is realized. Surprisingly, Shenxiu’s stanza, in which he saw there was impurity on the mind to get rid of to achieve enlightenment, could be read in the same way the Upanishad verse is. However, Shenxiu’s verse was supposed to be a depiction of how he understood the Buddha’s teachings, which reject the existence of atman. How then could both verses look alike? We must think that Shenxiu’s verse fails to demonstrate a correct understanding of the Buddha’s nonself (anatman). Hence the gradualism that Shenxiu’s verse represents may not be regarded as properly Buddhist.

In contrast to Shenxiu, Huineng stresses that since Bodhi originally has no tree and the bright mirror (the mind) is nowhere standing, there are no defilements to be eliminated in the first place. Enlightenment is to directly perceive the truth that originally there is not a thing—nothing exists as a separate and independent entity with intrinsic nature. Huineng’s verse implies that enlightenment is a sudden realization of the truth of emptiness that there is, to begin with, nothing that can be defiled. Awakening to this truth is nothing but an instantaneous event, so nothing more has to be done. Huineng’s verse was acclaimed, and, as a result, Huineng received the title of the Sixth Patriarch in Chan Buddhism.

Buddhist scriptures prior to Huineng support the way Huineng illustrated enlightenment as sudden enlightenment.

Those who seek to thus undertake the appropriate effort, by which they give up all comforts and go forth into the teaching of Buddha. Having gone forth, in a single instant they suddenly attain a thousand concentrations, see a thousand buddhas and recognize their power, shake a thousand worlds, go to a thousand fields, illumine a thousand worlds, mature a thousand beings, live for a thousand eons, penetrate a thousand eons past and future, contemplate a thousand teachings, and manifest a thousand bodies, each body manifesting a company of a thousand enlightening beings.

This passage expresses that enlightenment occurs instantaneously. Sudden enlightenment is to attain the concentration to realize the Buddha’s teachings and gain clear perception or “the Dharma vision” to see the majestic and auspicious worlds of buddhas.

Also, consider Anguttara Nikāya 4:179:

The Venerable Ananda said that “whoever declares the attainment of arahantship in my presence, they all do it. . . . There is the case where a monk has developed insight preceded by tranquility. As he develops tranquility and insight, the path is born. He follows that path, develops it, and pursues it—his fetters are abandoned, his obsessions destroyed.”

This passage suggests that as a practitioner develops serenity and insight, she suddenly recognizes the path: “The path is born.” Awakening to the path takes place as a form of sudden breakthrough attainment. The path becomes clear to her all at once and leads her to follow, develop, and pursue it afterwards. Enlightenment is hence directly perceiving the path instantaneously, and the process of cultivation follows afterward.

Sudden enlightenment is also depicted in the conversation between the Buddha and Udayi in Samyutta Nikāya 46:30(10):

The Venerable Udayi said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, while I was staying in an empty hut following along with a surge and decline of five aggregates subject to clinging, I directly knew as it really is: ‘This is suffering’; I directly knew as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering’; I directly knew as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering’; I directly knew as if really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’ I have
This illustrates that enlightenment takes place immediately and suddenly at one’s awakening to the Buddha’s teachings.

2. VICISSITUDES OF “SUDDEN” IN SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT

The word “sudden” is primarily construed as the sense of temporal duration, so the sudden/gradual debate could be a discussion about the short or long period of time we need to achieve enlightenment. “Instantaneous,” “all at once,” “at one glance,” and “simultaneously” can be substituted for “sudden” in sudden enlightenment. Also, “rapid” can be added to the list of the temporal senses of “sudden.”

However, it may not be satisfying if we have to evaluate the sudden/gradual debate on enlightenment only in the sense of temporality. For many of us, except maybe practitioners in the Zen traditions, would assume that enlightenment requires a great deal of time and effort to realize. The studies of scriptures, moral practices, and prolonged periods of deep meditations must be considered the desiderata of enlightenment. If one needs to satisfy all of them, it must be reasonable to believe that enlightenment cannot be achieved instantaneously. So sudden enlightenment, the enlightenment to be attained all of a sudden, might be impossible.

Demieville suggests a nontemporal sense of “sudden.” He explains the word “sudden” as “the totalistic aspect of salvation, which is related to a unified or synthetic conception of reality, to a philosophy of the immediate, the instantaneous, the non-temporal, which is also the eternal: things are perceived ‘all at once,’ intuitively, unconditionally, in a revolutionary manner.” What he intends to say seems to be that sudden enlightenment is to obtain a holistic or utmost comprehensive perspective of reality and that it likely occurs unconventionally. His proposal of a nontemporal sense of “sudden” is welcoming, but it may be an empty claim that acquiring a near-total perspective of reality is possible without explaining how such a perspective is obtainable.

Peter N. Gregory might help Demieville describe the nature of the totalistic perspective of reality. Gregory presents a nontemporal and qualitative sense of “sudden,” which invokes in some way the transformation of insight. As he discusses Zongmi’s theory of sudden enlightenment followed by gradual cultivation, he points out that Zongmi’s theory “integrates the experience of sudden enlightenment into a comprehensive vision of a progressive path of spiritual cultivation, one that emphasizes the importance of a sudden ‘leap’ of insight within a larger philosophy of progress.”

Several contemporary scholars have so far proposed various meanings and interpretations of the word “sudden” in sudden enlightenment. Some have a temporal sense such as rapid, instantaneous, all at once, and simultaneously; some present a nontemporal sense such as Demieville’s “the totalistic aspect of salvation,” Gregory’s “leap of insight,” and John McRae’s “transformation.” Scholars have tried to find a univocal concept of “sudden” to explain sudden enlightenment appropriately. However, it appears that their attempts only aggravate confusion about the concept of “sudden.” For, the word “sudden” has come to carry a variety of disjunctive meanings.

3. “SUDDEN” AS “PARADIGM-SHIFTING”

Hyun-Eung (현응), a Korean Buddhist monastic, has recently proposed that sudden enlightenment is revolutionary enlightenment. He first casts doubt on any attempts of interpreting “sudden” only in its temporal sense as “suddenly,” “instantaneously,” or “all at once.” According to him, “sudden’ means not only the simultaneous dissolution of the twofold interrelatedness of cognition and being, but it also, in its contents, signifies symbolically the total transformation of the worldview between before and after enlightenment.” He claims that sudden enlightenment is the revolutionary awakening of the dynamical and indivisible structure of cognitive subjects and objects and the comprehensive transformation of the worldview.

I agree with Hyun-Eung on the point that the concept of “sudden” in sudden enlightenment needs to be interpreted as “revolutionary,” differently from the sense of temporality or a vague sense of transformation of insight. Buddhists indeed have a completely different view of the mode of existence since they deny the existence of self. Also, they, especially Mahayana Buddhists, refuse to recognize any intrinsic nature of any entity because they accept the truth of Buddhism that every entity arises only depending on its conditions, thereby lacking independent existence and self-nature. The view of dependent arising and emptiness along with no-self is drastically different from the commonsensical understanding of the nature of...
persons and things we encounter in the world. The radical way Buddhists comprehend the world may lead us to the idea that enlightenment is achieved not in a conventional way but in a revolutionarily different way.

I further argue that Hyun-Eung’s meaning of “revolution” can be construed in terms of a scientific revolution as presented by the twentieth-century American philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Similar to the paradigm shift from geocentrism to heliocentrism, which took place in the fifteenth century, Hyun-Eung’s “revolutionary enlightenment” is realized through a “paradigm shift” in Kuhn’s sense. Revolutionary enlightenment is paradigm-shifting awakening: the awakening to the worldview based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness.

### 3.1 KUHN’S “PARADIGM SHIFT”

Let me first unpack Kuhn’s account of the scientific revolution. Kuhn views science as a puzzle-solving activity. As science discovers answers like the way puzzles are solved, science accumulates solutions to scientific puzzles. Science is practiced within a paradigm which represents, roughly, scientific systems and worldviews, and a scientist’s activity depends on her ability to master the given paradigm. A failure to solve a scientific puzzle, then, reflects on the incompetence of the researcher, not on the soundness of the paradigm. Scientists take for granted that the prevailing paradigm is correct and try to verify, rather than falsify, the given paradigm. This is normal science as Kuhn calls it. As normal science proceeds, its scientific knowledge gradually accumulates.

However, troublesome anomalies that pose a serious problem for the existing paradigm continue to emerge. Normal science and the existing paradigm can no longer explain, eliminate, or dismiss them. As such anomalies become widespread, a new paradigm emerges. The new paradigm can embrace and explain the anomalies that remain unexplained in the old paradigm. Eventually, the existing scientific systems and worldviews come to be replaced entirely by the new ones. This sweeping and revolutionary change in the scientific system is called a scientific revolution.

A scientific revolution is only possible with a “paradigm shift” where the old paradigm is overthrown or replaced by a new one. Such a complete transition in belief systems and worldviews is unable to be achieved by the gradual accumulation of scientific knowledge. For instance, no matter how much data we accumulate for geocentrism, we can never achieve heliocentrism without replacing the system itself. Hence the manifestation of the scientific revolution indicates that science does not undergo the way of progressing or improving toward the truth about the world. Science just changes whenever the global scientific system and worldview (i.e., a paradigm) are overthrown by new ones. Thus, the history of science signifies the history of change.

After a scientific revolution, the concepts of theories that constitute the old paradigm disappear, or the surviving concepts change their meaning within the new paradigm. For example, “planet” in the system of geocentrism referred to a celestial body that revolves around the Earth. After the scientific revolution, however, the homonymous “planet” in the new paradigm, heliocentrism, came to have a new meaning: a celestial body orbiting around the Sun. The concept of “planet” changed its meaning before and after the scientific revolution.

### 3.2 SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT IS PARADIGM-SHIFTING AWAKENING

Given Kuhn’s account of the scientific revolution, let us discuss Hyun Eung’s revolutionary enlightenment as sudden enlightenment. What Hyun Eung wants to say must be that revolutionary enlightenment is paradigm-shifting awakening. Sudden enlightenment takes place when a paradigm of belief systems is replaced with a revolutionarily different paradigm. It is the revolutionary transformation of one’s perspective of life and the world, from the pre-enlightenment worldview based on essentialism and realism to the worldview of enlightenment based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness. But note that, unlike Kuhn’s scientific revolution, revolutionary enlightenment takes place only once.

Prior to enlightenment, each person views herself as a separate and independent individual who has her own essence (intrinsic nature). Everyone has her own nature (i.e., self), which identifies her distinctly from others. An individual object is also regarded as a thing that has an immutable essence which defines, distinguishes, and separates it from other objects. All things exist as independent objects. When I look at an object, I as “the cognizing subject (i.e., cognizer)” exist and perceive the object, “being as the object.” The cognizer and the object are different and separate from each other. The domain of cognizing subjects is independent and distinct from that of objects. This worldview is based on essentialism and realism. Since we have this worldview, we perceive subjects and objects as separate and independent of each other.

However, when one understands the core Buddhist teaching of dependent arising (*Pratītyasamutpāda, 縁起*) and emptiness (*sunyata*, 空), she realizes that all things come into existence, abide, and pass out of existence only in dependence upon other things. The conditioned existence is the mode of existence of all things. Since all things arise in dependence upon other things, nothing exists on its own, and everything lacks self-existence and its intrinsic nature. Nothing has its own inherent nature (*svabhava*) that always makes a thing separate from and independent of others. Everything is empty of independent existence (or intrinsic nature), that is, everything is empty of essence. Everything is empty because everything arises depending on conditions. A Mahayana Buddhist who accepts the truth of dependent arising comes to comprehend the truth of emptiness. She can also appreciate that the truth of nonself is implied by the truth of dependent arising and emptiness.

One’s understanding of the Buddha’s teachings results in a shifting of her perspective of self and the world and,
Accordingly, leads her to obtain the insight that no one and nothing can exist independently of conditions including other people in society. One attains enlightenment when she awakens to the truth of dependent arising and that of emptiness. Any independent or immutable thing is no longer a real entity. The word “thing,” prior to enlightenment, means an individual that exists independently and separately from others. However, after enlightenment, since one recognizes that a thing arises dependently upon other things and is empty of its essence, it no longer exists as an independent and separate entity. It is now regarded as the relations to others. Here, the relations are not a secondary character of a thing to explain what a thing is. The relations are the mode of how a thing exists. Hence the same word “thing” becomes construed in terms of relations to others. One who achieves enlightenment by changing her worldview, therefore, knows that the way all things exist is determined by dynamic relations to conditions.

Once one awakens to the very mode of existence, the enlightened one realizes that the chasm between the domain of “cognizing subject” and that of “being as the object” disappears. She sees that “cognizers” and “objects cognized” do not have their own independent and separate domains. The domain of the subjects and that of the objects determine and constitute each other simultaneously. Cognizers and the objects cognized are interrelated and interpenetrated. It is the demise of the difference between subjects and objects. Enlightened ones comprehend this kind of dynamic structure of subjects and objects and realize that cognizers and beings as the objects should be examined simultaneously, not successively.

Enlightenment is not a gradual process. It is a dramatic and revolutionary shift of paradigm, that is, a radical change in one’s perspective of self and the world. What this point implies might be surprising to some people. Recall the paradigm shift from geocentrism to heliocentrism. Scientists pursued the accumulation of scientific knowledge within geocentrism. However, we know that the amassed scientific knowledge did not lead the scientists to automatically understand the new paradigm, heliocentrism. They needed to shift their worldview completely from geocentrism to heliocentrism. Indeed, such a complete transition in belief systems and worldviews is radical and unable to be achieved by the gradual accumulation of scientific knowledge. It is the same case in enlightenment. However persistently and tenaciously one keeps training and purifying the mind, she cannot attain enlightenment while she remains in a pre-enlightenment paradigm. The prolonged period of her studying scriptures, moral practices, and meditations will be in vain as long as she maintains the essentialist and realist worldview. She is required to undergo, for achieving enlightenment, a radical and total change of her worldview, from the essentialist and realist paradigm to the one based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness. There is no partial or gradual enlightenment. When the paradigm shift happens, the change is comprehensive. The truth of nonself, dependent arising, and emptiness applies to everything in the world logically, all at once, instantaneously, and simultaneously. It is a sudden (頓) change.

4. CONCLUSION
I conclude that revolutionary enlightenment aptly explains the features of sudden enlightenment. I interpret “revolution” as “revolution” in Kuhn’s notion of scientific evolution and argue that revolutionary enlightenment is achieved through a “paradigm shift” in Kuhn’s sense. Sudden enlightenment is paradigm-shifting awakening. The awakening is the comprehensive transformation of worldview, from a pre-existing worldview based on essentialism and realism to a new perspective based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness. The paradigm-shifting awakening can serve as a guiding principle for understanding Buddhist practices and enlightenment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
I am much indebted to Chang-Seong Hong for his comments.

NOTES
1. This English translation of Huineng’s verse is based on the Tun-huang version of The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch.
4. Avatamsaka Sutra, 719, emphasis added.
5. Anguttara Nikāya 4:179, emphasis added.
6. Samyutta Nikāya 46:30(10), emphasis added.
7. See also Samyutta Nikāya 15:13; 22:59(7); 25:1; 35:28(6); 35:74; and Majjhima Nikāya 70.
8. John McRae, “Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch’ an Buddhism.”
11. McRae suggests that sudden enlightenment is a rapid and complete transformation into the enlightened state. See McRae, “Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch’an Buddhism.”
15. It may be a bit unusual to speak of a “paradigm shift” in an individual’s belief system, not in the belief system of a scientific society. “Perspective change” could serve better in this context. However, Buddhists would encourage all the individuals of a society to have this “perspective change” for enlightenment. So, we can say that a “paradigm shift” is required for enlightenment.
16. When this exists, that comes to be; With the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; With the cessation of this, that ceases. (Samyutta Nikāya 12:61)
17. Samyutta Nikāya 35:85(2); 41:7.

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Korean Philosophy: Comments on Seok, Wang, Kim, and Yu

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ABSTRACT

This contribution consists of responses to four papers. The first, by Professor Bongrae Seok, argues for the importance of Korean Neo-Confucians attached to moral psychological analysis of the mind and emotions and how this can help us understand three of the major debates within the tradition—the Four-Seven, Horak, and Simseol Debates. The second, by Professor Hwa Yeong Wang, introduces the Ritual Debate and argues that it is founded on deep philosophical beliefs that not only are essential for understanding its meaning and significance in Joseon times but also point to important contemporary issues concerning gender and ritual. The third, by Professor Hannah H. Kim, defends the philosophy of Juche, commonly translated as “self-reliance,” against what she deems to be uncharitable criticisms and contends that it advances a valuable set of philosophical claims. The final contribution, by Professor Sun Kyeong Yu, presents the Korean Buddhist monastic Hyun-Eung as offering a novel account of “revolutionary enlightenment”—an “awakening of the dynamical and indivisible structure of cognitive subject and objects”—in terms of Thomas Kuhn’s notion of a paradigm shift.

I. RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR BONGRAE SEOK

In his paper, Professor Seok argues for a set of interconnected claims about (1) the importance Korean Neo-Confucians attached to moral psychological analysis of the mind and emotions and (2) how three of the major debates within the tradition—the Four-Seven, Horak, and Simseol Debates—can be understood as reflecting conflicts between what he calls the “normative” and the “psychological” approaches to issues such as the nature of the mind, moral emotions, and moral virtues. He further contends that such an understanding (3) differs from what he calls the “standard account,” which he traces back to the modern Japanese scholar Tôru Takahashi, which explains these debates and much of the history of Korean Neo-Confucianism in terms of fundamental disagreements between what he calls the i/ii school and the gi/qi school. Finally, he holds (4) that his suggested alternative offers a more productive way for scholars of Korean Neo-Confucianism to productively engage Western philosophical theories such as moral foundationalism, moral constructivism, Humean/Kantian moral psychology, and modular and nonmodular processes of moral cognition.

In light of my limited understanding of Korean Neo-Confucianism, it seems to me that claims (1) and (2) are not at all controversial. Of course, scholars present different analyses of a variety of issues within the complex debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism, but I do not believe anyone would deny, either, that thinkers within this tradition attached great importance to moral psychological analyses of the mind and emotions or that “normative” and the “psychological” approaches played a major role in their understanding of a range of issues connected with the nature of the mind, moral emotions, and moral virtues. I will return to these two questions later on, but now turn to Professor Seok’s third claim about how his model offers an alternative to the “standard model,” which he describes as based on fundamental disagreements between the i/ii school and the gi/qi school. Whether we see these contrasting approaches as “schools” and what it might mean to be a school are separate and complex issues, which has a bearing on this claim but which I will not discuss here. Rather, I want to explore the more general question of how disagreements about i and gi might serve as a way to understand the basis of these Joseon Dynasty debates.

It seems to me that there is quite a range of interpretations about what it means to claim that disagreements about i and gi served as the pivot for many philosophical debates of the period. At times, Professor Seok presents the disagreement in rather absolute terms: as if one side, represented by people like Toegye, exclusively focused on i, while the other, represented by people like Yulgok, exclusively focused on gi. There may well be people who defend such positions, but from some of what Professor Seok says, I think we can agree that this is not the most thorough or insightful way to see things. All of these thinkers accepted that both i and gi play important roles; the question is not so much one or the other but what roles did these concepts play?

My own view is that, roughly speaking, Toegye held that i is morally more foundational and pedagogically more important, since it is through an initially theoretical grasp of pattern-principle that one understands the nature of actual things and events in the world and how they all hang together in the unified system that is the Way. In contrast, Yulgok taught i and gi are less distinctly separated from
one another. For him, gi is morally more foundational and pedagogically more important, since it is through a grasp of actual things and events that one understands the i that constitute the Way and underlie the nature of the world around one. While they surely did disagree about the metaphysics of i and gi, in many ways, their disagreements are more directly connected to, more clearly manifested, and more easily understood in their quite different approaches to learning. Now, this is but one way in which to see their disagreement as turning on issues concerning i and gi that does not make the mistake of claiming there is some absolute difference of opinion concerning these key concepts. So, while helpfully emphasizing largely overlooked or under-analyzed aspects of Korean Neo-Confucian thought, I do not see a clear or distinct contrast between the standard interpretation and Professor Seok’s proposed alternative. One surely could disagree about the metaphysics of i and gi and hold that these differences reflect and support more “normative” or “psychological” approaches to issues such as the nature of the mind, moral emotions, and moral virtues. In fact, I think this is what we find in the three debates that Professor Seok discusses. So, it is not clear to me why Professor Seok sees his interpretation as inconsistent with the standard explanation. Moreover, I worry that “normative” simply stands in for i and “psychological” simply stands in for gi, and, if so, the proposed alternative is not really all that different but simply restates the standard view using modern Western concepts that are quite foreign to Joseon philosophical thinking.

Professor Seok argues that the alternative interpretation he proposes offers a more productive way for scholars of Korean Neo-Confucianism to engage Western philosophical theories such as moral foundationalism, moral constructivism, Humean/Kantian moral psychology, and modular and nonmodular processes of moral cognition. He does not develop this part of his argument extensively within the limited scope of his paper, and so I don’t have anything definitive to say in response to this set of claims. I am not altogether clear what precisely Korean Neo-Confucianism has to offer on these particular topics. I do wholeheartedly agree with Professor Seok that an approach that focuses more on the normative and psychological aspects of the nature of the mind, moral emotions, and moral virtues and less on Neo-Confucian views about i/ri and gi/qi will have much more to say to contemporary philosophers working in areas such as moral psychology and the virtues.

II. RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR HWAYEONG WANG

Professor Wang’s paper introduces the Ritual Debate that occurred over a period of several decades, beginning in 1659, that, at least initially, concerned how the Queen Dowager should mourn her stepson, the deceased King Hyojong. She argues that the Ritual Debate cannot and should not be understood merely as a controversy over etiquette or manners or as simply a factional power struggle. Rather, the debate is founded on deeper philosophical beliefs that not only are essential for understanding its meaning and significance in Joseon times but also point to important contemporary issues concerning gender and ritual. I will first present in summary form my understanding of her core arguments. In the concluding section of my remarks, I will pose a couple of questions concerning the contemporary significance of her findings.

As part of her argument about the philosophical foundations for the Ritual Debate, Professor Wang notes that, during the Joseon Dynasty, rituals both granted obligations and powers to government officials and limited their individual roles and prerogatives and so functioned as a form of “constitutionalism” that offered a medium through which people engaged in practical reasoning concerning a wide range of political and ethical issues. This is an extremely important point and helps us recognize often neglected philosophical dimensions to ritual systems such as those found in the Joseon. On a more particular level, she notes that underlying the Ritual Debates were more fundamental questions such as whether rituals, as markers of moral pattern-principle (i 理), have universal application or whether exceptions can be made for the royal family and, in particular, whether the king’s position as sovereign should take precedence over his filial rank. Among other things, this shows the intimate relationship between metaphysical beliefs about pattern-principle and some of the core issues in the Ritual Debate. It also shows why those who upheld the former stance fiercely defended agnatic descent, which was thought to reflect the pattern-principle of the universe. This, in turn, often had profound implications for questions about royal succession, the status of women, and the nature and normative force of ritual.

We have already pointed to some of the well-known implications the Ritual Debate held for questions about legitimate succession. Women were prohibited from playing a central role in the line of royal succession and only those children who were part of the strict agnatic line of the king could hope to inherit the throne. Beyond such questions, though, is the general effect the debate had on women of this and subsequent periods. Professor Wang argues that the prominence of the agnatic principle is the source of the strong patriarchal nature and male-centeredness of later Korean society and those ritual practices and customs regarding such things as marriage and ancestral rites that support such inequities. This observation also should alert us to the ongoing prejudice contemporary scholars tend to display in studying the debate. For example, it is only recently that the role of figures such as Queen Jauui has received serious scholarly attention, despite the central role she played in the Ritual Debate. Finally, the issue, mentioned above, about the normative force and application of ritual and, in particular, how closely this was related to underlying metaphysical beliefs, is an important philosophical issue that calls out for more careful and thorough analysis.

I would like to conclude by asking Professor Wang to elaborate on some of the contemporary implications of the fascinating observations she has made in the course of her study. In particular, after noting how earlier commitment to agnatic principles has continued to echo down through time and inform contemporary practices, she holds out the prospect that the work she and others are doing in excavating and revealing these hidden and unexamined
foundations will help loosen their pernicious influence on the everyday lives women in Korea are leading today. Beyond this, though, she raises the further prospect of reimagining and reforming rituals such as marriage and mourning so that they not only are purged of patriarchal elements but also explicitly and positively support and promote gender equality. And in regard to such rituals, she asks whether they can or should aim to preserve the more universal quality characteristic of traditional pattern-principle or whether they should accommodate variety and multiplicity. I know this is a large topic, but I ask Professor Wang to offer a few thoughts on this constructive or reconstructive project.

Second and finally, Professor Wang trenchantly notes that her study raises questions about the normativity of ritual in general. Recent debates in ritual theory have taken diverging trajectories. Some seek to reconnect ritual to metaphysics in the belief that rituals shorn of metaphysical justification will lose their normative authority and prove incapable of achieving their roles in providing meaning, structure, and stability to individuals and societies. Others seek to sever rituals from their traditional metaphysical contexts and argue that they can still retain their value and work to the benefit of individuals and societies. My final question is again very large, but I ask Professor Wang to say a few words about whether her reconstructive project seeks to maintain some sort of metaphysical foundation for rituals—and, if so, what that might be—or sever the connection between metaphysics and rituals. If the latter, what does she think will happen to traditional Confucian values such as sincerity or authenticity in a world of “as-if” ritual practice?

III. RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR HANNAH H. KIM
Professor Kim sets as her goal to defend the philosophy of Juche, commonly translated as “self-reliance,” against what she deems as two uncharitable criticisms advanced by Alzo David-West: “that Juche’s axiom is too vague to be of philosophical use and that Juche makes stark distinctions between human vs. everything else.” She also contends that since Juche is the official state philosophy of North Korea, “it would be politically expedient, not to mention intellectually worthwhile, to analyze it in a way that would help us make sense of its motivational force.” I fully endorse Professor Kim’s aim of giving Juche a fair hearing and, though not an expert on Juche, I will do my best to sort out some of the difficulties presented in her essay and offer a way forward for those interested in adjudicating these matters.

Professor Kim notes that Juche holds up “political independence, economic self-sufficiency, and military self-reliance as the ideals of the state.” Given these characteristics, it would seem clearly to be a political philosophy and in a more straightforward and pure sense sociopolitical or political objects and relations.”

David-West’s first criticism is that “Juche’s axiom is too vague to be of philosophical use.” Later in her paper, Professor Kim presents this as the criticism that Juche is “really a kind of subjective idealism, a metaphysical view that what we take the world to be is inextricably tied to our subjective projections and observations.” David-West goes on to enumerate a number of weaknesses with this kind of broad and admittedly vague metaphysical position, but Professor Kim objects on the grounds that since Juche is clearly a political philosophy, it is not “productive to read metaphysical commitments from it.” It is not clear to me whether she holds that it is not fair to claim that metaphysical commitments are essential or prominent in Juche philosophy. To decide this issue, we would need to look at the philosophy itself in more depth and with more care, a point to which I shall return below. Professor Kim complains that David-West bases his criticisms on a narrow and overly literal reading of Juche writings and offers a couple of arguments by analogy to the US Constitution, showing that an uncharitable reading of lines from this document can be construed as presenting equally implausible philosophical claims. The crux of her defense is that Juche’s claim that “man is the master of everything and decides everything” should not be taken as a universal metaphysical view, but as an epistemological claim “quantifying over social or political objects and relations.”

David-West’s second criticism largely concerns the slogan that “man is the master of everything and decides everything,” which, he contends, “makes too stark a distinction between humans and everything else” and seems to imply that humans possess “the ability to transcend the laws of nature.” Professor Kim offers three responses to this objection. The first is that “the idea that man is the measure of all things is an ancient idea (attributed to Protagoras); second, the hierarchal understanding of the universe, with man on top, might be coming from Confucian influences over Juche; and third, the slogan need not posit a man vs. everything else binary.” Since we are interested in the plausibility of the view, the force of the first two points is not clear to me, but here interested readers may feel, as I felt throughout her essay, that Professor Kim has not provided us with a way to assess the claims on either side of these debates for ourselves. This was true when she defended Juche by drawing analogies with uncharitable readings of the Constitution and her disagreement with David-West about whether metaphysical views are essential to or implied by
Juche philosophy, which I mentioned above. In regard to the earlier case, the points she made about distorting a text or philosophy with tendentious cherry-picking are well taken, but what I would like to know is who, if anyone, is doing this. Aside from two or three short phrases, there is not a single quote from any Juche writing in Professor Kim’s essay, and so I don’t know whose view to take as the better representation of Juche philosophy. I look forward to Professor Kim and other scholars of Juche to present a well-argued case for the integrity and relevance of Juche, but in order to do that, one needs to make a case, much in the way a lawyer does by providing evidence and arguments on one’s client’s behalf and against her accuser. Until then, the goal of “giving Juche a fair hearing” has not begun, the jury is not so much out as yet to be seated.

IV. RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR SUN KYEONG YU
Professor Yu presents the Korean Buddhist monastic Hyun-Eung as offering a novel account of “revolutionary enlightenment,” claiming that it is constituted by and consists of an “awakening of the dynamical and indivisible structure of cognitive subject and objects.” Professor Yu argues that this account of the nature of sudden enlightenment, or, more accurately, the nature of the process leading to sudden enlightenment, can be understood more clearly and completely by drawing upon the work of the historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn. Roughly, she argues that we can understand Hyun-Eung’s account of “revolutionary enlightenment” on the model of a scientific “paradigm shift,” as presented in Kuhn’s seminal work The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Revolutionary enlightenment is a kind of paradigm-shifting awakening, the comprehensive transformation of a worldview, from one based on essentialism and realism to one based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness.

A Kuhnian paradigm shift occurs when the dominant paradigm under which “normal science” operates can no longer account for and is rendered incompatible with a new set of challenges. Such a condition results in the adoption of a new paradigm that can handle the unruly and problematic phenomena. Kuhn illustrated the model of a paradigm shift with the example of the change from a geocentric to a heliocentric view of the earth. He also pointed to the duck-rabbit illusion, made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein, to demonstrate how a paradigm shift could lead someone to see the same phenomena (the “world”) differently. One can see the attraction of thinking of sudden enlightenment as a paradigm shift, since the Buddhist practitioner moves from seeing a world of stable things and an enduring self to a world of no-self and emptiness. In making that shift, she moves from the unenlightened to the enlightened state.

According to Hyun-Eung, “‘sudden’ means not only the simultaneous dissolution of the twofold interrelatedness of cognition and being, but it also, in its contents, signifies symbolically the total transformation of the worldview between before and after enlightenment.” Hyun-Eung clearly sees sudden enlightenment in terms of a radical change in the interpretive frame through which one understands the world and that is similar to Kuhn’s theory about paradigm shifts in science. Nevertheless, the appeal to Kuhn might worry some people in that it might be seen as offering an overly intellectual account of the required shift. In one respect, this worry may be warranted since, in the case of Buddhism, in making the shift, one gives up a psychological commitment to the self and this relieves one of suffering. Nothing quite like this is involved in the case of a scientific paradigm shift.

I would like to point to another feature of paradigm shifts in science and Buddhist sudden enlightenment that Professor Yu does not explore, and this concerns the degree to which both involve a change not only in beliefs but also in practices. Kuhn sometimes talks about paradigm shifts more in terms of theories or models, for example, the respective theories of Ptolemy, Copernicus, or Newton’s Principia as laying down the principles of physics. But he also talks about paradigm shifts in terms of the general ways in which science is done, and this goes well beyond any particular theory or system, regardless of how central and influential it might be. Recognizing the complex nature of Kuhnian paradigms might lead one to see that paradigm shifts can occur in many different ways; sometimes, a profound theoretical insight results in a dramatic shift in the conception and practice of science, but sometimes, the dramatic shift occurs after a series of smaller changes in practice and conception reaches a kind of critical mass that elicits the paradigm shift.

Both these features of scientific paradigms are found in Chan Buddhist views about sudden enlightenment as well. The spirit verses of Shenxiu and Huineng seem to say that the debate about sudden enlightenment is as much about practice as it is about doctrines about the self and emptiness. The Avatamsaka Sutra also emphasizes practice or right effort, saying, “Those who seek to thus undertake the appropriate effort, by which they give up all comforts and go forth into the teaching of Buddha. Having gone forth, in a single instant they suddenly attain….” Given the radical nature of Chan beliefs about the self and the mind, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to pry apart doctrine and practice and, for different reasons, one could say much the same about shifts in scientific paradigms. I don’t know what to say about some of these additional similarities, but it seems that a fuller appreciation of the complex nature of scientific paradigm shifts might offer a model that captures even more aspects of the debates about sudden and gradual in the Chan tradition.

Response to Ivanhoe

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In his comments on my paper, Professor Philip Ivanhoe asks stimulating questions about my interpretation of the i-gil li-qi philosophy and the philosophical debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism. I appreciate his insightful comments and suggestions and, in this essay, I will briefly summarize his comments and respond to them. First, he observes
that my interpretation of the i-gi-li-qí philosophy is based on a narrow characterization of the i-li-gi/qí philosophy and the two major philosophical schools of Korean Neo-Confucianism. Second, he asks if my interpretation of the major debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism through the normative and psychological approaches is consistent with the standard interpretation of Korean Neo-Confucianism through the i-gi-li-qí philosophy. Third, he asks about different ways Korean Neo-Confucianism can contribute or relate to contemporary philosophy and moral psychology.

I will respond to his first and third comments and then explain my interpretation of Korean Neo-Confucianism to answer his question in his second comment. Regarding the first comment, I believe that Korean Neo-Confucians, when they affiliate themselves with the Toegye or Yulgok schools, emphasize certain aspects of i-li or gi/qí, but they do not necessarily ignore or exclusively focus on i-li or gi/qí. This is the reason the i-li school, for example, is usually called juripa (唯理派 mainly or mostly i-li school), not yuripa (理倫派 only i-li school) in Korean Neo-Confucianism. On this account, I agree with Professor Ivanhoe that i-li and gi/qí are not mutually exclusive and that the i-li school, for example, does not deny the philosophical significance of gi/qí. However, the i-li and gi/qí schools (juripa and jugiipa) competed for philosophical dominance in Korean Neo-Confucianism during the Joseon period. Although i-li and gi/qí are always interactive and mutually complementary, Korean Neo-Confucians believed that seeing things (mainly or mostly) from i-li's or gi/qí's viewpoint makes a substantial philosophical difference. In my paper, I discussed this competitive and contrastive relation between the two schools of thought and asked whether utilizing the i-li-gi/qí framework, although practically useful in characterizing the overall philosophical orientations of Korean Neo-Confucianism, is a good way to understand the philosophical debates and innovative thoughts of Korean Neo-Confucianism.

Regarding the third comment, I believe Korean Neo-Confucianism, as a philosophical tradition that focuses on the moral nature of the mind, has theoretical relevance to contemporary studies of moral psychology and moral cognition. Although it invested heavily in the metaphysical nature of the mind through the intriguing relation and interaction between i-li and gi/qí, contemporary moral philosophy and cognitive science would pay more attention to the way Korean Neo-Confucian philosophers explain the affective, cognitive, and developmental nature of the moral mind than to the way they explain the i-gi-li-qí metaphysics of the mind and morality. I agree with Professor Ivanhoe on this point and believe that this moral psychological relevance to current philosophical and empirical studies of the moral mind can be an exciting development in comparative studies of Korean Neo-Confucianism. In my paper, I briefly sketched several viewpoints to understand Korean Neo-Confucianism in the context of contemporary theories, including moral foundationalism, moral constructivism, Humean/Kantian moral psychology, and modular moral cognition.

Regarding the second comment, I agree with Professor Ivanhoe's interpretation of the i-gi-li-qí philosophy, specifically the Toegye and Yulgok schools' contrastive emphases on the importance of i-li and gi/qí on the matters of morality and moral cultivation. However, when it comes to major philosophical debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism and their rigorous analyses of the moral nature of the mind, the metaphysics of i-li and gi/qí does not seem to provide a clear and coherent frame of interpretation. The i-gi-li-qí metaphysics is a comprehensive system of philosophy that explains a broad range of natural, social, and moral phenomena, from the ultimate foundation of the universe to the moral virtues of individuals. However, it has serious philosophical limitations when it is used to explain the moral goodness of the mind. First, the Neo-Confucian principle of “mutual distinction but no separation” (bulsang/giap 不相離 不相雜) tells us that i-li and gi/qí are distinct elements of the universe, but they are always together. In other words, they are different but not exclusive of each other. However, when it comes to moral goodness, good and evil are different and exclusive of each other or, at least, they do not have to be together. Therefore, applying the i-gi-li-qí metaphysics to moral goodness poses an inherent challenge in explaining the exclusive relation between good and evil by the inclusive terms of i-li and gi/qí. This is particularly so when i-li and gi/qí are associated with some aspects of good and evil, respectively. Second, the mind is a system of psychological processes that are supported by gi/qí's variable and contingent activities, but it also develops a moral character with i-li's regulative order. How to combine, in the mind, the two contrastive processes together in a coherent manner? These are the two main reasons why utilizing the i-gi-li-qí framework brings only limited success in interpreting and explaining the major debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism that raised questions about the moral nature of the mind. Perhaps, the existence (if not the resolution) of serious and extended philosophical debates in Korean Neo-Confucianism such as the Four-Seven Debate, the Horak Debate, and the Simseol Debate demonstrates the inherent difficulty of applying the metaphysical framework of i-li-gi/qí to the matter of the moral goodness of the mind.

Although Korean Neo-Confucians continued to use the terms of the i-gi-li-qí metaphysics such as i-li, gi/qí and seong/xing in their writings and followed the general philosophical discourse of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, what they attempted to explain and what they debated about are not clearly or fully understood by the metaphysical terms of i-li, gi/qí, sim/xin, and seong/xing as witnessed in Yi Hang-Ro's provocative statement that the mind is i-li (how can the mind, if its activity is supported by gi/qí, be i-li?), Jeong Yak-Yong's contentious statement in his seong gihoe seol (性嗜好說) that nature (seong/xing性) is simply the inclinations of the mind (how can consistent and coherent seong/xing be reduced to the variable dispositions of the mind?), and Toegye's ingenious explanation of the causation of the Four Emotions, i.e., i-li starts [the causation] and gi/qí follows (how can physically inefficacious i-li cause the Four Emotions?). For this reason, one should understand critical and innovative views of Korean Neo-Confucianism, specifically in the context of philosophical debates, from the perspective of the moral mind that can recognize moral values and cultivate virtues, even though the i-gi-li-qí metaphysics provides a general
framework for the interpretation of the broad philosophical and historical context of Korean Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon Dynasty. In my paper, I discussed two different ways of explaining the moral mind in the philosophical debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism through the normative and psychological approaches.

Response to Ivanhoe

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Many thanks to Professor Philip Ivanhoe for his comments. In the following, I’ll provide clarifications where they’re needed.

Professor Ivanhoe motivates the study of Juche by comparing its political commitments to theories espoused by John Rawls (based on a moral principle or goal) and Han Feizi / Niccolò Machiavelli (focused on running a successful state). I agree that Juche is unlike these since it is explicitly focused on the well-being of a particular culture and people. Whatever truth claims Juche makes, as Professor Ivanhoe notes, must be indexed to the Korean context, and it remains to be seen what, if anything, can be universalizable from Juche.

I had written that our efforts on Juche would be best spent looking for political insights, and that Alzo David-West’s complaints about Juche’s metaphysics—for instance, that it makes a silly mereological mistake that a part (“man”) is greater than the whole (“everything”)—is uncalled for. Professor Ivanhoe takes my objections to be grounded on the fact that Juche is a political philosophy and wonders whether I think it’s unfair to read any metaphysical commitments as essential or prominent in Juche philosophy.

What I meant to highlight wasn’t that any metaphysical reading of Juche is inappropriate. Instead, I drew attention to Juche’s status as a political philosophy to suggest that facile metaphysical readings of Juche are not worth our time. There are certainly metaphysical commitments we can read off of Juche. For instance, solipsism or moral realism would be incompatible with Juche. The suggestion was that trying to derive from Juche any metaphysical claim divorced from a reasonable context, or readings that lead to obvious falsities, would be unproductive, and that our time might be better spent focusing on the sociopolitical points made by Juche. It’s a good question just what kinds of metaphysics would be compatible with Juche, but I first needed to rule out David-West’s conclusions.

Professor Ivanhoe makes a methodological point that more primary literature ought to have been cited. I agree with this assessment: I should model, and not simply say, that we need a more careful study of Juche. However, I’ll add a small note on the worry that “[a]side from two or three short phrases, there is not a single quote from any Juche writing” in the essay. Speeches make up a large portion of what scholars inspect when they study Juche. For example, the maxim “man is the master of everything and decides everything” was first mentioned during an interview with Japanese journalists in 1972, ten years before the publication of On the Juche Idea. So, when I quote from speeches or works applying Juche (e.g., On the Art of the Cinema), I am providing evidence from texts that inform the study of Juche. Still, On the Juche Idea should have been cited, and I heed the overall methodological point that a more careful appeal to primary sources would be helpful going forward.

Let me close by clarifying what the scope and aim of my piece were. The goal was to show that some criticisms against Juche are not enough to render Juche incoherent or meaningless. By showing the various responses a philosopher might offer on behalf of Juche, I showed how Juche might be defended against David-West’s allegations. For example, we might point to the plausibility of the axiom “Man is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything” by examining other contexts from the history of philosophy where ideas akin to “man is the standard/measure of all things” showed up.

Professor Ivanhoe correctly notes that I don’t provide a way to assess whether Juche really is reasonable or not. This was a “feature,” not a “bug.” The case I was making (in the limited space I had) was that Juche deserves a closer look.

In the opening of the piece, I write that it’s possible that Juche is truly a sham. Still, a fair hearing is warranted, so the first thing to do was to diffuse the obviously unhelpful criticisms and offer readings of Juche that would be more rewarding to explore. To follow Professor Ivanhoe’s legal analogy, the aim of the piece wasn’t to show the defendant is innocent, but to show why the accusations aren’t enough to show the defendant to be guilty. Better evidence must be brought forth to argue for either Juche’s “innocence” or “guilt”—and I’m glad that Professor Ivanhoe and I agree this to be the next task.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

GOAL OF APA STUDIES ON ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES

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 Asian 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 Asian American philosophers and those engaged with Asian and Asian American philosophy. We encourage a diversity of views and topics within this broad rubric. None of the varied philosophical views provided by authors of 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.
committee and the journal are committed to advancing Asian and Asian American philosophical scholarships and bringing this work and this community to the attention of the larger philosophical community; we do not endorse any particular approach to Asian or Asian American philosophy.

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

5) **Guest editorship:** It is possible that one or more members of the Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies could act as guest editors for one of the issues of *APA Studies* depending on their expertise in the field. To produce a high-quality journal, one of the co-editors could even come from outside the members of the committee depending on his/her area of research interest.
Bar On’s scholarship, fruitfully opening up critique of care ethics (and any moral theory) as being a viable foundation on which to build political theory; instead, the political must stand on its own. That point extends to Bar On’s ambivalence about the use of violence as a method of self-defense and making oneself into a “ready-to-fight body” in a world where the threat of violence is oppressive.

In “Local Communities, the Social, and Obligations to Refugees,” Jennifer Kling argues that local communities, and not just states, have special obligations to refugees and refugee-like persons. Those obligations emerge in light of two themes from Bar On’s work: the social as a site of violence and nonviolence, and the idea that refugees should have the opportunity to lead minimally flourishing lives. Kling does not argue that such obligations replace or are more important than those borne by the state. Rather, even if states satisfied all their obligations, local communities are still the place where persons are able to be safe, to flourish, and to be in community with others.

In “‘Violent Bodies’: Two Feminist Perspectives,” Dianna Taylor reflects on the differences between her own and Bar On’s positions on violence and its potential for deployment in the context of feminist liberatory projects, and in particular in contexts of feminist resistance to sexual violence. Taylor identifies the ways she and Bar On draw on and interpret aspects of Hannah Arendt’s *On Violence* in diverging ways. Ultimately, Taylor endorses a broader use of violence against sexist oppression than she reads Bar On as having done, while noting their shared commitment to self-criticalness and self-reflectiveness where practices of violent embodiment and feminist resistance occur.

In “‘Mere Talk,’ Accountability, and Repair: Arendt and Bar On on Civility,” Alice MacLachlan offers an approach to civility that takes guidance from both Arendt and Bar On, noting that if there is a notion of political civility worthy of valuation, it will amount to those practices, values, norms, habits, and institutions that make talk possible. That is, political civility may be conceived as the conditions which make it possible to talk through the most difficult things in public space, even in the presence of significant political difference and conflict. Noting legitimate critiques of civility, MacLachlan draws on concepts of accountability and repair from Arendt and Bar On to identify misuses and abuses of civility.

In “Appreciating Being Seen: Attunement and Recognition,” Lori Gruen considers Bar On’s philosophical, professional, and personal impact through the lenses of recognition and misrecognition. Within many of the aspects of violence...
discussed in Bar On’s philosophical contributions, among the contributions of others in the field (Medina, Dembroff, Honneth, Dillon, Butler, Warren, Davis III), Gruen notes misrecognition as one of the harms that permeates. Gruen offers a reflection on one of the ways Bar On’s presence was received and vital in the profession, as one who made others feel recognized and seen.

In “Hannah Arendt and Bat-Ami Bar On on Violence Against Women,” Yasemin Sari takes up the project of challenging the “unspeakability” of gendered violence, finding in this moment the political potential to make social structures less oppressive. Bringing Arendt and Bar On to bear on the question of gendered violence, Sari considers the potential for political agency following experiences of violence, and the significance of the speech of survivors.

In “Reflections on My Mentor, Ami,” Jess Kyle shares some of her experiences as a graduate student working with and learning from Bar On. In particular, Kyle notes Bar On’s ability to quickly build trust, her kindness and openness of thought, and her strong support and guidance, both academically and personally.

In “The More Things Change: Prejudice, Lack of Generosity, and Closed Borders for Refugees 1946 and 2015,” Serena Parekh reflects on some of Bar On’s writings that were in progress at the time of her death. Parekh focuses on two themes emerging from the writings: first, Bar On’s reflections on her family’s experience of being refugees in 1946, and second, Bar On’s evaluation of the EU’s response to the migrant and refugee crisis of 2015. Bar On’s family attempted to enter Mandatory Palestine, overseen by the British, but were turned away and deported to Cyprus, where her parents lived in a detention camp. Parekh draws out points of connection between these events, even as they are more than fifty years apart. In both Bar On’s family history and in the cases of Middle Eastern and African refugees attempting to arrive in Europe in 2015, we see refugees being met with violence and refusal, and the necessity of being smuggled into states. Parekh reflects on Bar On’s own positions regarding the obligations of states in response to people seeking asylum, and her grappling with tensions among positions on the exercise of state sovereignty and border control on the one hand and ethical concerns with military action against people smugglers on the other.

These pieces showcase some of the many ways Bar On shaped philosophy as a discipline and profession as a whole, and so many of the careers and research trajectories of feminist philosophers within it. We are grateful to the authors for their contributions, and to Lisa Tessman, Bar On’s spouse, for sharing the photos included in this issue. We are honored to reflect on such a rich life and significant philosophical legacy in our first issue as co-editors.

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.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature reviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow The Chicago Manual of Style.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the newsletter, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are always seeking new book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the incoming editors, Ami Harbin (aharbin@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

On Justifying Violent Self-Defense

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Upon a scholar’s passing, there are multiple ways to mark the significance of their contribution to the field. I want to honor Bat-Ami Bar On in this article by expressing appreciation for her intellectual contributions and gratitude for the influence of her work. I interweave three thematic threads emblematic of Ami’s work to form the fabric of the words that follow: generosity, ambivalence born of the ambiguity of violence, and the impossibility of reducing the political to the ethical. Rather than assigning a single theme to each of the three sections that follow, I offer reflections on these themes by braiding them together in different ways. I do so while reflecting on the critical insights and generative possibilities of Ami’s scholarship. Throughout, I am occupied, as she was, by the subject of violence, both as a topic of philosophical inquiry and as that to which women and gender minorities are consistently subjected. Given the background thurm of violence that accompanies their lives, I concentrate on the slippery possibilities of justifying violent self-defense through the use of violent women bodies, to use Ami’s term, in response to sexual violence.

1. A methodological approach prevalent in The Subject of Violence is that of placing theoretical analysis of violence alongside autobiographical reflection. In that spirit, I start by offering a public autobiography that features Ami’s personal and intellectual generosity, as well as her abiding commitment to the irreducibility of the political to the ethical. I share Ami’s ambivalence about “the performance of a public autobiographical act” in doing so. Yet, my first interactions with Ami offer small tales perhaps too good not to tell.

While working as an assistant professor at the University of Memphis, I was tasked with organizing the Spindel Conference, an annual faculty-directed event on a variety of subjects. My topic of choice was “Global Feminist Ethics and Politics.” I was delighted when Virginia Held accepted the invitation to keynote the event with a paper entitled “Military Intervention and the Ethics of Care.” My pie-in-the-sky plan was to ask Bat-Ami Bar On, whose writing on violence I admired, to respond. The critical engagement from a prominent violence theorist who was not a care ethicist could, I thought, prove a fascinating point of contrast and critical engagement. I also recognized that there was little chance that someone of Ami’s standing would say yes. Yet, she did, quickly, and with much friendliness to an early career philosopher who was still learning how to plan and run academic events.

Ami’s response to Held’s keynote was incisive. In “Military Intervention in Two Registers,” published in volume forty-six of The Southern Journal of Philosophy, Ami began by first saying that she agreed with nearly everything Held argued for. For example, she agreed that the success of a violent military intervention does not establish that the intervention was morally acceptable or justified. She agreed with Held’s assertion about the usefulness of the rule of law as a source of considered criteria for the justifiability of specific deployments of violence in international relations. Ami also concurred with Held about the importance of context in two key ways. First, the moral justifiability of any specific military intervention must be rooted in considerations of the wider global context. And second, because “the context of violence is a condition of its possibility,” addressing the social, economic, and political circumstances that foster and condone violence is essential for reducing “the temptation of violence and its deployments,” even those that can be justified. Thus, Held and Ami were on the same page about the necessity of closely tying the means of accomplishing anything like global pacification to efforts to rework global relations on multiple fronts. Moreover, while Ami was clear that she was not a care ethicist, she asserted that she agreed with care ethicists, as she put it, “in a very general kind of way” in believing “that care is indeed crucial for human flourishing” and “that a caring disposition and comportment make a difference in all relations, be these human relations or relations between humans and animals, as well as all humans and the environment.”

So, with such extensive agreement, where was the rub? Watching the opening moments of Ami’s commentary unfold, I began to wonder if I had been mistaken to believe that her philosophical sensibilities would provide a trenchant critique of the kind of analysis care ethics could offer of military intervention.

And then we reached the final paragraph of Ami’s introduction, where she stated the following:

My disagreement with Held . . . is not about whether what she terms traditional moral theories, be their form classical, updated, and even feminist, can do more than what she believes they can do. I am not suggesting the superiority of any moral theory over care ethics. I do not champion the use of any moral theory for the evaluation of political institutions, practices, and actions, including deployments of violence in the political realm and for political ends, including military interventions that Held believes they can be used for. And I am extremely concerned about positioning ethics with respect to politics in such a way as to expect moral theory to ground the normativity of politics.

And we were off to the races! With this move, Ami destabilized the entire structure of Held’s argument: Ami didn’t come to disagree with the use of care ethics as a suitable moral theory to guide analysis of the political; she came to dispute the entire enterprise of foundational positioning of any moral theory vis-à-vis political normativity. Any enterprise that would judge political praxis via moral theory required extreme caution.

Held’s argument was sharp. Ami met that sharpness in a way that was even more pointed, while remaining eminently fair and intellectually generous. Although Ami was clearly
suspicious of certain ways of mixing the ethical and the political, she still recognized that values do matter in politics, holding that "by and large the norms of politics are themselves political and that . . . they are not independent of political power." So the normative has a role to play in politics, but the norms of politics must be political all the way down.

Toward the end of her commentary, Ami noted that while she remained critical of Held's turn to moral theory—in this case, care ethics—to "validate a political norm," she also granted that such a move "makes sense, given the current historical conjecture" of late capitalism and the Left's inability to give up the twin projects of critique and revolution (drawing on Wendy Brown's analysis). Such circumstances, Ami acknowledged, made a turn towards morality attractive.

Ami delivered a first-rate keynote commentary. This was the case because of her recognition of what were also, in my experience, representative of who Ami was as a person. She employed generosity to acknowledge the common ground she shared with Held, and then drew on her distinctive form of perspicacity to analyze their differences and set forth the strength of her own position.

This scholarly approach was mirrored in my interactions with Ami during the Spindel Conference as a whole. Unbeknownst to most people, I was in my first trimester of pregnancy and very much in the throes of morning sickness, or, in my case, all-day sickness. So I would introduce a speaker or make a conference announcement and then attempt to casually sprint to the bathroom to throw up. I had gotten pretty good at hiding my shaky state, but Ami noticed I was struggling. She also somehow intuited that I was newly pregnant, making her one of a handful of people in the know. She gave me steady and unflagging support throughout the conference. The series of quiet kindnesses she offered made running that event much easier for me than it would otherwise have been. We ended up talking a lot during the three days we were together. One conversation, in particular, has stuck with me for years and influenced some of the work I continue to do today.

I don’t remember how our conversation about PTSD arose, but I will never forget its content. Ami’s frankness and insightfulness regarding the long reach of trauma caught my attention for the underlying courage she evidenced. Her personal reflections on trauma are most certainly not mine to share. And at that point, my thoughts were not ones I really shared with anyone, and especially not those in the profession. She helped me understand, perhaps for the first time, the connection between personal experiences of trauma and their broader political significance, and through her own bravery, that trauma wasn’t a private experience to be shamefully locked away in one’s psyche. It would take me years to come to write philosophically about trauma. And it is in part because of Ami that this was possible.

As a junior professor, I was kind of in awe of Ami. She embodied a striking juxtaposition: she was deeply kind, and, to speak frankly about how I saw her, she was a complete and total badass. She exemplified what I have come to think of as a distinctive feminist ethos: that of generous badassery.

In addition to remaining generous throughout, Ami’s response to Held was firm-footed and astute. Yet, upon reflection, one can detect two comingling, somewhat contradictory affects in her keynote commentary: surety about the necessity of the ethical not grounding political normativity met with a general uneasiness about violence as a political measure. This uneasiness finds full voice in Ami’s discussion of violent women bodies in The Subject of Violence, where she evidences a resolute ambivalence regarding the nature and uses of violence. Ami’s commitment to ambivalence in the face of violence’s ambiguities is valuable and can provide critical purchase on recent feminist work on sexual violence.

The final chapter of The Subject of Violence is entitled "Violent Bodies," which, in Ami’s words, "raises questions regarding a voluntary exposure to the subjectifying force of violence by people who train their bodies in some martial arts." It is an intriguing end to a book that unflinchingly and repeatedly situates violence as a destructive force. Ami addresses this tension head-on by noting that, in light of what the earlier essays in The Subject of Violence set forth about violence, "one may be tempted by a principled pacifism. But while I would like to be a pacifist, I am not, and, moreover, I am a martial artist." "Violent Bodies," Ami tells us, is an attempt to make sense of the unease of this apparent contradiction.

The work Ami accomplishes in "Violent Bodies" is important for ongoing feminist conversations regarding self-defense and sexual violence. What I want to underscore is the crucial element it contributes to that conversation, namely, the importance of ambiguity and ambivalence for any form of resistance to sexual violence.

"Violent Bodies" is situated within a section of The Subject of Violence called "Ambiguous Alternatives." For Ami, physical self-defense in response to sexual violence is nothing short of fully framed by ambiguity. The honesty that undergirds this ambiguity is both complicated and admirable. Ami establishes that it is not possible to draw a sharp distinction between the ready-to-fight body and the violent body. Any supposedly sharp distinction between the potential and the actual violent body is necessarily murky, and, it turns out, morally and politically vexed. Ami meditates on the desire and motivation to draw and maintain that sharp distinction in these words: "I suspect that what motivates an attempt at a clear-cut distinction is anxiety about and a need for innocence, a need to be as cleanhanded as the pacifist that I feel that I cannot be, if for no other reason than because I am burdened by the materiality of my violent body. How can I not be seriously troubled," she asks, "by my continued engagement in the maintenance and reproduction of my body as a violent body when many feminists are very critical and suspicious of violent bodies, seeing, just as I do, violent men’s bodies as the primary implement of violence in the everyday kinds of violence that women experience. . . ."
Here, to draw on the autobiographical again as Ami so elegantly does throughout *The Subject of Violence*, there is a resonance between her experience and my own. I entered adulthood at a college with very strong Quaker roots, where I wrangled uneasily with the commitments necessary for a principled pacifism. And years later, as the parent of a queer kid—whom I wanted to equip with skills of self-defense for a world that sometimes wants to violently erase their existence—I made martial arts training a weekly family activity. We learned to do push-ups on our knuckles. We learned how to respond defensively to high velocity maneuvers aimed directly at our bodies. We learned how to punch through increasingly thick boards with our bare fists. And, after all of this learning, over time, we emerged with brown belts. There is power in how we cultivated our own ready-to-fight bodies. But there is also sadness, danger, and a necessary and abiding discomfort in training myself to respond to a world of violence against women’s bodies. Perhaps even more complicated is the sorrow in having actively sought to train my own child—to have actively pursued the cultivation of their own ready-to-fight body with its ever-abiding, necessarily uneasy proximity to a violent body.

Ami, of course, is not the only feminist philosopher to have thought deeply about self-defense and violence against women. What I want to argue here, however, is that Ami’s resolute ambivalence (if that’s not too paradoxical a phrase) about constructing one’s body as a ready-to-fight body adds a crucial element to feminist discussions of self-defense, one that has gone underappreciated.

In recent work, I have considered techniques of resistance to sexual violence. There, I have argued that we must begin by carefully analyzing definitional moves, that is, how we define and understand the scope, content, and causes of sexual violence. This is important because these definitional moves determine the possibilities of resistance.

In exploring this crucial point, I have critically engaged feminist philosophical writing on self-defense as one prominent model of how we might resist sexual violence. More specifically, I explore the evolving conversation between Ann Cahill, on the one hand, and Susan Martin and Carine Mardorossian, on the other. In doing so, I uncover what I take to be several assumptions about sexual violence found in self-defense theories and practices. These include conceptualizing sexual violence as an event that is temporally discrete instead of an experience that is durationally sustained; as something that occurs through acts rather than through affects or attitudes; and as an occurrence that transpires primarily on the level of the individual (and individual responsibility) rather than the interpersonal or structural.

While my approach has generally been one of assessing the limitations of self-defense vis-à-vis its framing of sexual violence, I also appreciate the value of feminist theories of self-defense and practical self-defense training for how they reduce and prevent the harms of sexual violence by beginning to shift the embodied experience of the sexually oppressed. Both, in different ways, can help center people in their own power and agency.

The ability to simultaneously hold both the pluses and minuses, so to speak, in mind represents a main strength of Ami’s approach to violent self-defense. What Ami’s work on violent women’s bodies illustrates is that one’s approach to feminist self-defense need not be mainly approving or critical—neither strictly pro nor con. Instead, any adequate approach needs to be abidingly ambivalent—positioning and consistently holding the meaning of such self-defense as intentionally ambiguous. Physical self-defense in rape culture is likely necessary, and it will never be innocent. Training a violent hand requires proximity to the-destructive forces of violence. In taking on such training, that hand will never be clean. From Ami, we learn that the path forward for the feminist literature on self-defense and real-world practices should happen precisely by maintaining the tensions between those who argue for why such practices matter for defense against the myriad forces of violence against women and those who respond critically.

3.

As a final means of celebrating Ami’s life and scholarship, I shift from appreciating her intellectual generosity (characterized by a sense of giving) to appreciating the generative nature of her work (characterized by a sense of giving rise to). I do so while maintaining Ami’s resolve ambivalence in response to the ambiguities of violence. One way to appreciate the generative nature of Ami’s work is to think with her about what could arise from her concept of violent women’s bodies by asking the following question: What might it mean to justify self-defense beyond the physical?

The concept of “self-defense” as it currently tends to be envisioned may not capture all the reasons we have to defend ourselves against sexual violence. This is especially the case when we consider forms of defense against sexual violence beyond physical defense, such as psychological and emotional defense. Such forms of “self-defense” may be something women take on not only to protect themselves but also to resist rape culture and to help protect other women and gender minorities.

Ami maintains the importance of constructing ready-to-fight bodies. A focus on physical self-defense is a crucial start. Yet, the forms of sexual and gender violence we experience every day far exceed the physical. Assault may take the physical form of abuse or rape; it also regularly takes the form of verbal attack, psychological abuse, and saturation in cultural ideas and ideals that violently suppress self-determination, not to mention sexual agency. Ami furnishes the grounds for the uneasy justification of violent self-defense of a physical nature. Given that sexual violence regularly exceeds the realm of the physical, might we also want to explore possible justification for forms of self-defense of a mental, emotional, and/or psychological nature? And the questions that quickly follow are ones of what exactly those forms of self-defense might look like and how training for them might take place.

In asking these questions, I do not assume that the realm of the physical is utterly cordoned off from that of the emotional and psychological. Training in physical self-defense can give rise to agential shifts of a psychological
and emotional nature. But in posing these questions, note that I am taking seriously the idea that the destruction that psychological and emotional violence render can be as devastating as physical violence. Yet, the forms of self-defense training that are readily available for those likely to experience sexual violence routinely start from the physical and are designed to respond specifically to physical assault.

So what might the shape of self-defense training of a verbal, emotional, or psychological nature look like? And what might be the specific benefits of engaging in such training be? I suspect that a shift from physical self-defense to taking psychological and emotional defense seriously would sidestep some of the criticisms I have raised regarding how the feminist self-defense literature frames sexual violence. Giving the need for other forms of self-defense proper weight would resist the prioritization of sexual violence as an act rather than an affect or attitude. Emphasizing the importance of psychological and emotional self-defense also shifts the attention away from resisting rape to a broader focus of resisting the full spectrum of forms of gender violence. And such training would draw attention to and provide resources for responding to sexual violence beyond the event of assault.

Of course, by opening this door, I am also opening space in which we need to think carefully about the political risks of training to become psychologically and emotionally ready-to-fight, following Ami’s cautioning in The Subject of Violence. There, she writes: “to the extent that bodies are produced as implements of violence, they may take on implemental characteristics. . . . Feminists who take on bringing into being violent women bodies have to stay aware of this. A feminist cannot merely celebrate the transgressive excess that she creates through the construction of her own or other violent women bodies.”

Applying this crucial warning to a possible expansion of forms of self-defense beyond the physical highlights a primary feature of Ami’s legacy: Feminists need to continue to hold squarely in mind how the construction of violent women psyches/emotions/attitudes is not an uncomplicated gain. It also should not be the subject of an unthinking celebration for the transgressions it might engender. Honoring Ami’s scholarly contributions requires that feminists remain purposefully uneasy about cultivating and adopting any form of violence as a political measure, bringing to bear her quintessential and fascinating mixture of ambivalence and ambiguity in the face of violence.

### Notes

1. At the very beginning of The Subject of Violence, Ami discusses her process of coming to understand violence as a condition of her life. In a passage I have always thought to be particularly perspicacious, she notes: “I have come to this knowledge slowly, disavowing it, pretending, far more than once, that I could escape or refuse it; hence, that I could make violence my subject of reflection but, at the same time, as I venture to master it through its analytic combinatorial dissections, deny being as much the subject of violence as it is mine” (ix). Bat-Ami Bar On, The Subject of Violence: Arendtian Exercises in Understanding (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).


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*History is a pattern of timeless moments.*

— T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding, V*

States, as the dominant institutions on the world stage today, have political obligations to refugees. However, they are not the only sociopolitical entities that have a role to play in solving, or at least ameliorating, the current and ongoing refugee crisis. Local communities also have social obligations to refugees and refugee-like persons, which they must uphold regardless of their participation (or nonparticipation) in the oppressive and violent histories that led to the global refugee crisis.

Following two prominent themes of Bat-Ami Bar On’s work—the social as the site of violence and nonviolence and that refugees should be ensured a decent chance at minimally flourishing lives—I argue that we must consider more carefully what local communities owe to refugees. This will involve thinking through how different community structures and ways of being make possible and impossible certain kinds of relations with refugees. In her final work, Bar On calls on scholars and activists to rise to the challenge of delineating well-worked-out discussions of and solutions to the refugee crisis. We need these details now, she argues: the refugee crisis is only going to worsen due to...
local political instabilities and regional violent conflicts that will continue to be exacerbated by the effects of climate change, which overall disproportionately negatively affect the Global South. This article seeks to honor Bar On by striving to answer, at least partially, her call.

I. BEGINNINGS
I use “refugee” to refer to a broad category of people. For me, it includes not only those who have fled across an internationally recognized border due to a well-founded fear of state or state-sanctioned persecution on the basis of their social or political identity, but also those who have fled their homes due to social and/or political persecution but have not crossed a border, as well as those who have fled violent military conflict. The first group are de dicto refugees according to international law. The second and third groups are often regarded as de facto refugees by the international community, although they are not, strictly speaking, regarded as such by international law. This, as I have argued elsewhere, makes their position especially vulnerable. Some theorists distinguish between “refugees” and “refugee-like persons” to gesture at this de dicto/de facto distinction. I find it more helpful to simply speak of refugees in the broad sense. This follows Bar On’s Arendtian understanding of refugees as those persons who “are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.” We might update this sentence from Arendt’s 1943 rendering to reflect the fact that “internment camps” are now commonly called “refugee camps” by the international community. Despite the name change, the serious human rights violations emblematic of such camps have continued. Refugees are those who have suffered state or state-sanctioned violence and, fleeing, receive no succor from other states but instead are subjected to more violence, albeit often under a different guise.

The world is currently facing a refugee crisis. As of May 2022, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) put the number of refugee and refugee-like persons at over 100 million for the first time ever. Roughly, one in every seventy-seven persons has been forcibly displaced from their home due to the threat or actualization of violent persecution and military conflict. Furthermore, as Bar On writes, “the use of violence against . . . refugees” once they have fled is on the rise; she notes that “refugee rights [have] been eroding in industrialized countries . . . the justification of [such violence and] refugee detention is a mix of political, economic, and cultural nationalisms.” Bar On identifies this violence against refugees, in the forms of detention, dispossession, physical altercations, and more, as part of a pattern of rising fascism throughout Europe and the United States. This increase in state and state-sanctioned violence against refugees is occurring despite the fact that several political theorists and activists have called for states to live up to their legal, political, and moral obligations (which they have, according to international laws, conventions, protocols, treaties, and norms) to provide aid, and in particular, aid in the form of safe resettlement, to refugees.

It is natural to look to states to provide such aid to refugees; as the dominant political institutions in the current global community, they have both the power and the de facto authority to do so. States can, and should, give refugees a safe place to live. Yet they are failing to meet this obligation. The reasons for this failure are many and varied; I discuss some of them in other work, as does Bar On in her article, “But Is It Fascism?” Here, I will not focus on states’ failures, but on a further claim, which is that providing refugees with a physical place to make a life, as Michael Walzer puts it, is not sufficient to provide them with a decent chance at a minimally flourishing life. It is true, of course, that all people need a place to live and make their home. The resettlement that states politically ought to provide is necessary—but it is not yet sufficient. For a decent chance at a minimally flourishing life, refugees need more than somewhere to live; they need the opportunity to be in community with others, to be “in good relation” with those who live around them. This is where local communities have a role to play, because such communities influence, if not create, the particular social contexts that facilitate or obstruct the ability of refugees to relate well in the places where they live.

To be clear, states must resettle refugees; I do not want to denigrate or lessen the force of that obligation. My argument, rather, is that even if states were to fulfill their obligations to refugees, local communities would still have obligations to refugees, because having a decent chance at a minimally flourishing life requires more than a safe place; it also requires the opportunity to be in community with others who are in that place. Additionally, insofar as local communities can influence what their states choose to do (some states, at least, are sensitive to their members’ attitudes and desires), local communities are obligated to work toward being in good relation with not only actual resettled refugees, but also potential resettled refugees. This is crucial because such attitudinal changes at the local level have the potential to impact whether and how states work to fulfill their obligations to refugees. So we should not think in terms of either state obligations or local community obligations, but rather recognize that both sets of obligations matter and are complementary. While local communities cannot resettle refugees—only states can do that—they do nevertheless have important social obligations to refugees, both because of how they function and because of how they interact with and influence the state(s) of which they are a part. Local communities can thus exacerbate the global refugee crisis or be part of the solution. I here focus on why and how they ought to be the latter.

II. LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE SOCIAL
For Bar On, the social is the site of violence and nonviolence in that the “context of violence is a condition of its possibility.” It is a particular social context that makes violence possible and that makes it what it is in any specific case. As she explains elsewhere, thinking through a violent act, “its magnitude and therefore radicality depend on its position in the nexus of social relations and the normative understanding of its worth and how these constitute the context of its performance and its meaning.” Violence is always situated in the social; thus, it is “not so in exactly the same way in all situations.” Interpreting and furthering Hannah Arendt’s emphasis on actual social,
legal, and political conditions, Bar On points out that “it matters whether [the violent act]’s performance is socially marginalized, detested, criminalized, and punishable under law, or alternatively, though considered in negative terms, also put up with and somehow exempted,” because these social relations tell us how to understand what has occurred as well as how to evaluate it. We can only see and understand violence as it occurs within our particular material communal situatedness; it, and its cousin nonviolence, are impossible to grasp without some existing social context or other.

Bar On is not here echoing Michel Foucault’s claim that social power constructs values and ideas—the view is not that such power determines the dominant ideology, which in turn determines what is and isn’t violence. Violent acts are such regardless of whether the dominant ideology so labels them; but their full nature and meaning depends on the nexus of social relations in which they (always do) occur. At the same time, though, Bar On is not saying simply that how we interpret instances of violence is context sensitive. Instead, she threads the needle: she takes up an Arendtian understanding of the links between social conditions and normative understandings, which allows for “uncommon distinction[s]” to be made. Social conditions, which are always subject to contestation, set what ways of being and meaning-making are possible so that the full nature of the violence in question is only interpretable through consideration of the actual social conditions in which it occurs. To put the point another way, we are able to read and understand violence for what it is only through the lens of the social, because the web of relations in which we exist—which are set through our social structures and are thus malleable via our agonistic engagement—sets the nature of our worlds.

Bar On’s emphasis, which she shares with many other feminist scholars, is on the actual social conditions in which we find ourselves. These social conditions make possible and impossible certain understandings, evaluations, and relations with others. While Bar On focuses particularly on the social as the site of violence and nonviolence, I take her point and broaden it to draw out and interpret the seemingly innocuous yet important claim that the social provides the context through which we live and make meaningful our lives. Local communities are socially, politically, and physically structured in particular ways. That structuring makes possible or impossible opportunities to learn, play, work, and build relations (good or bad) with others. This is the “space of politics,” Bar On writes—it is always local, sometimes physical, always contestable (even if not always contested), and crucially, “a space [that] both highlight[s] and profoundly depend[s] . . . on human plurality.” We need connection to this space—as it needs us—if we are to live (and understand ourselves as living) minimally flourishing lives.

Local communities, their social structures, and their communal spaces of practice are not static things; they do not represent or embody human unity, even on a small scale. Rather, they are malleable, sensitive to, and dependent on, individual and group engagement. They are also important, because they—as we have seen—set the conditions of possibility for ways of being, for learning, playing, working, and building relations with others. Humans cannot build flourishing lives without social conditions that leave open the possibility of, if not enable, their doing so. Putting this together with another key theme from Bar On’s work, discussed above, that refugees deserve a decent chance at a minimally flourishing life, it follows that we have a social obligation to build into our local communities social structures and communal spaces of practice that invite and facilitate positive relations with refugees. Without these, refugees who are resettled into local communities remain unconnected to the space of politics and thus unable to be in good relation with established community members. Communities must provide resettled refugees with the opportunity to engage in the situatedness that is emblematic of being in a positive web of social relations; otherwise, they do not have a decent chance at a minimally flourishing life.

To be clear, to be in a positive web of social relations with others is not necessarily to agree with, or be the same as, them—the space of politics depends on human plurality rather than unity. Following Kim TallBear, who is also “thinking in terms of being in relation,” we can understand this as “an explicitly spatial narrative of caretaking relations” that “requires us to pay attention to our relations and obligations here and now.” Contrasting a hierarchical settler mythology that depends on the exclusion and erasure of some people and groups with her “relational web framework,” TallBear says, “I focus here, not then.” The space of politics exists where and when people are able to build community with others via social structures and communal spaces of practice that invite them to learn, play, and work. But, as Bar On notes, this
space is "quite fragile and cannot be made otherwise" because it depends on an acceptance of human plurality, of people relating well across their differences rather than muting those differences to survive.\textsuperscript{33} To foster the social conditions of possibility for a minimally flourishing life, then, local communities must "make accommodation, cede space, . . . [and] actively relate" with refugees, rather than assimilating, excluding, or erasing them (as often happens in Global North communities).\textsuperscript{34} The goal is to develop the social so that people—refugees and already established community members—can "relate well in this place without that inherently eliminatory dreaming" that TallBear argues is a feature of settler colonialism and Bar On argues is a feature of rising fascism.\textsuperscript{35}

III. PRACTICALITIES

It is one thing to say that local communities have an obligation (best understood as a social obligation rather than a strictly moral or political one) to set up social structures and communal spaces of practice that invite refugees into the local space of politics, that provide opportunities to be in good relation with those who live around them, as we might say, in the here and now. But it is another thing entirely to describe the necessary and sufficient features of those structures and spaces in a way that is even partially action-guiding. This, though, is what Bar On argues is so crucial; we must think through the specifics of any solutions that we proffer in order to make headway on the refugee crisis, to move toward ensuring refugees have a decent chance for a minimally flourishing life.

So let us consider what kinds of social structures and communal spaces of practice are such that they afford the opportunity for creating positive relations between refugees and established community members. Throughout this discussion, I have in mind local communities in the Global North, although I think that my more general comments can be applied, with modifications as needed, to local communities in other parts of the world. Following Bar On’s theoretical framework, any particular practical claims about what communities should do must be sensitive to their actual material, social, and external constraints; still, we can maintain that even communities facing serious constraints have an obligation to do what they can to welcome refugees into the local space of politics. To begin, certain communal ways of being, such as fascistic ones and nationalist ones with fascistic tendencies, make positive relations impossible—\textsuperscript{36}—but others make them possible.\textsuperscript{37} The good ones are those that build a culture of open sociality, wherein situatedness in the local space of politics is encouraged via the social structures and spaces of practice that support learning, playing, and working. I focus on each of these activities because they are all essential, if not foundational, aspects of any local community.

Turning first to learning, it is a truism that the education of current and future generations is a critical, and indelibly social, task. It takes place formally and informally—both in schools and through media, both in daycares and through daily familial interactions.\textsuperscript{38} Of course, different local communities have different educational needs and resources, and so will need to create different formal social structures and spaces of practice. For instance, agricultural communities need to be sensitive to planting and harvest times when developing the structure of the school year, unlike urban communities, which in turn may need to be more sensitive to when rolling electrical blackouts are likely to occur during the year. Despite these kinds of differences, though, which are a function of existing in different localities and social conditions, all communities should work to ensure that their educational communal spaces of practice and social structures operate to invite newcomers into the community of learning rather than to block them out.

For example, local communities with possible new members need to ensure that prayer and reflection rooms are available for those faculty, staff, and students who may arrive and have daily religious practice obligations. Whether such rooms are utilized or not, they are a welcoming signal; they are a way of ceding space to and making accommodation for newly resettled refugees. More broadly, local schools need to be open to all, regardless of historical affiliation; parochial schools fracture the space of politics by insisting on certain elements of unity rather than embracing the plurality that is essential to forging active relationships with newcomers to the community. Continuing along these lines, universities and other higher education spaces ought to develop pathways for recognizing degrees from other countries as meaningful; one quick way to isolate someone is to make it clear that their years of schooling do not matter here (wherever “here” turns out to be).

In addition to their formal educational social structures and spaces of practice, local communities should also consider their informal ones, such as community dialogue groups and media (both children’s media and content aimed at adults). Local communities should consider setting up, or facilitating the existence of, informal educational forums and discussion groups focused on refugee issues, to encourage established community members to first learn about and then respond to refugee resettlement more broadly and actual resettled refugees more specifically.\textsuperscript{39} Such open, dialogue-focused spaces of practice can foster a willingness to respectfully engage with refugees, and refugee resettlement, from a place of curiosity, rather than react from a place of not-knowing. While such dialoguing cannot replace the pervasiveness of internet and social media discussion, it can provide an alternative to it.\textsuperscript{40} Following John Stuart Mill, local communities should respond to toxic internet and social media speech about refugees with more and different speech about refugees. In this vein, it is important to recall that not all internet and social media discussion of refugees is toxic: while 4chan and pernicious Reddit threads certainly exist, so too does antiracist TikTok, refugee-friendly Facebook, and the like. Local communities might even consider making use of such content (for example, the UNHCR’s Instagram feed is an excellent source, as is the International Rescue Committee’s Twitter) in the creation of dialogue-friendly spaces and groups. While such spaces of practice and informal dialogic structures cannot supplant online discussion, they can provide community members with more and alternative points of view, as well as the tools to respond substantively to negative online commentary about
refugees and refugee issues more broadly. And importantly, when communities foster dialogue-friendly spaces where established community members can respectfully engage with refugees and refugee resettlement, it is a way of actively relating to refugees; such work helps to create a social context wherein it is possible for refugees to be in good relation with their new community.\(^4\)

The discussion of media is deeply complex: I do not have space to fully investigate it here. The one thing I will say is that local communities have an obligation to ensure that their media is not forwardings only a “single story” about refugees.\(^5\) Of course, much media is now globalized; the era of the local newspaper is gone in many parts of the world.\(^6\) So this is in part a call to those local communities that do have control of the various global media makers to ensure that they are putting forward a multiplicity of stories.\(^7\) It is also a call to other local communities to do what they realistically can, through encouraging local content creation (e.g., supporting local and regional authors, singer/songwriters, and other artists, as well as community theater productions, art competitions, and the like) and diverse media consumption (e.g., hosting movie nights, book clubs, guest speakers, and community watch parties, and supporting independent cinemas, art galleries, and the like). Broadly, media must show human plurality to invite and encourage the recognition of others that is needed to create and maintain the space of politics. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, “the consequence of the single story is that it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult.”\(^8\) Having a single story about refugees is problematic not only because it leads to unthinking stereotypes among established community members, which in turn cause difficulties in building positive community relations with refugees, but also because it can lead refugees to believe that there is only one way of being available to them. “Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again,” Adichie continues, “and that is what they become.”\(^9\) By contrast, when many stories are available, the social conditions are such that refugees can make meaningful their lives in a variety of ways, because they can recognize themselves, via those stories, as part of the human plurality that makes up their new community. The opportunity for such meaning-making, as Adichie too concludes, is a crucial part of living a minimally flourishing life.\(^10\)

Media, of course, is not only about learning, but also about playing. One of the ways people play is via the creation, consumption, and critique of media. Professional critic A. O. Scott goes so far as to say that the production of representations, and subsequent critical discussion about those representations, is what makes us human.\(^11\) Regardless of whether we accept that claim, it is doubtless true that media is one of the mediums through which we play as well as learn; thus, there is even more reason for local communities to ensure, to the best of their abilities, that their media lets everyone into the game, be it as a creator, a consumer, a critic, or some combination of all three. While funding is always an issue, especially for local communities that have severe resource constraints, public libraries, museums, movie theaters, video arcades, festivals, gaming groups, etc., ought to be low- or no-cost, open to all, and explicitly welcoming to new arrivals to the community. This is difficult to do in free market economies, but not impossible, as urban revitalization projects across the Global North consistently demonstrate. Again, opening up these play-oriented spaces of practice is a way of ceding space to refugees; doing so creates a context that encourages the forging of relationships that enable refugees to play (and, if Scott is right, to exercise their humanity).

Such relationships are essential because play, like learning, is indelibly social. People can and do play alone, but even when they do so, what and how they play is a result of the social conditions in which they exist; the social sets the conditions of possibility for play of various kinds to occur. Consider the creation of local green spaces versus hostile architecture: one makes outdoor play possible, and even invites it, while the other forecloses such possibilities. Providing green spaces accommodates all sorts of games, especially those which are likely to be played by children who would otherwise be strangers to each other. (Anecdotally, but I suspect not unfamiliarly, my child makes new best friends, who differ from her in several ways, every week at our city park, while I chat with their caregivers. These connections would be much more difficult, if not impossible, were it not for the social structures that make possible the maintenance of this space of practice.) Providing spaces, be they parks, other green spaces, or no- or low-cost community centers, where children and their caregivers can easily connect through play, allows refugees the chance to integrate into local community networks, which in turn provides the opportunity for them to join the local space of politics and be in good relation with others in the here and now.\(^12\)

The abilities to learn and play are key elements of having a decent chance for a minimally flourishing life. Included in such a life is the ability to work, which is itself also a function of social structures and communal spaces of practice. Local communities should strive to provide opportunities for meaningful work that are not distributed either on the basis of citizenship, other discriminatory practices, or the infamous “old boys’ network,” which relies on restricted, exclusive relational webs. Rather, opportunities for meaningful work should be apportioned on the basis of aptitude, with an eye to building and developing workplace cultures that are collegial and open to human plurality. This is somewhat vague, but includes local communities setting up social structures that support equity in hiring, anti-discriminatory practices, hiring fairs for refugees and other newly arrived community members, and forums on ethical, social, and political responsibilities in business. Additionally, local communities should provide pathways for individuals and groups to engage in civil rights disputes against companies; political solidarity around workplace issues not only fosters class consciousness (à la Marx) but also community consciousness, which is critical for the formation and maintenance of the local space of politics.

Like educational spaces, workspaces in various local communities will differ. For instance, factories and high-rises will not be able to build collegial spaces of practice in the same ways because of the physical constraints they
each face. The point though, is not that work-oriented spaces of practice in different local communities must look the same; rather, it is that they should “feel” relevantly similar in that they afford opportunities for creating positive relations between resettled refugees and established community members. This can be as simple as having a weekly or monthly “coffee/tea hour” for all employees and as complex as providing facilities for work colleagues to engage in recreational activities such as table tennis, foosball (also sometimes called table football or table soccer), or group video games. While these examples are perhaps specific to the Global North, the point is that allowances like these provide the conditions for rapport to build among work colleagues; they are an acknowledgment that space is needed for collegiality to occur and flourish, and a signal that such collegiality is welcomed in the workplace. Such signals are small, but they can be a lifeline for resettled refugees who simply want a place to live and build community with others.

Ultimately, it is difficult for local communities to create the social conditions that make it possible for refugees to relate well in that place. Nevertheless, in order to provide refugees with a decent chance at a minimally flourishing life, local communities must try, in ways that are sensitive to their resource and other external constraints, to encourage certain communal ways of being, and not others, through their social structures and spaces of practice. It is these that can help overcome the structural difficulties refugees face; for by altering local social structures and spaces of practice to make it possible for refugees to be in good relation, it is possible to change the regional, national, and even international views, attitudes, and approaches that make the current refugee crisis so intractable. This is clearly aspirational, but not, I think, so wildly optimistic as to be untenable, especially when we consider that many states within the international community ostensibly operate in response to their members’ attitudes and desires. If local communities shift toward welcoming actual and potential refugees, this will have at least two effects. First, it sends a signal to their state’s political elites that accepting more refugees would be politically popular or at the least, politically acceptable. Since politicians like to do what is popular, this could lead states to begin to fulfill their obligations to refugees. Second, shifting local attitudes in favor of building positive relations with refugees will eventually produce members of the political class who regard respecting refugee rights as “normal” and “the correct thing to do.” While this is not a quick solution to changing regional, national, and even international views, attitudes, and approaches, it is precisely the tactic used by the LGBTQ+ Movement in the United States to go from the Stonewall Uprising to the (now federal) legalization of gay marriage inside of fifty years. To tackle the global refugee crisis, part of what we need are broad cultural, sociopolitical shifts; and those start at the local level, with communities learning how to be in good relation with refugees and then eventually producing leaders who think in terms of protecting refugees as a matter of course.

To be fair, no single one of the suggestions made above is sufficient by itself to enable refugees to connect to the local space of politics, to build positive relationships in the here and now in which they find themselves. But together, these suggestions may point us toward sufficiency, and good relations at the local social level can impact the global. The key is to create patterns; the actual social obligation of local communities is to create a pattern of moments that when woven together provide a communal way of being in which positive relations with, between, and among refugees and established community members is possible. Such a weaving would, I dare say, make Bat-Ami Bar On proud.

NOTES
1. Of course, states are not the only institutions that make up the international community. They are simply the most dominant ones currently, although that is changing with the rise of multinational corporations that function as de facto states. A key difference between states and multinational corporations is that such corporations are dispersed, rather than unified within bounded territories.

2. This is a core claim of contemporary refugee studies, and so I will not defend it here. See Bat-Ami Bar On, Serena Parekh, and my own work, among others, for arguments in support of this view.

3. The interplay between local communities’ obligations to refugees and states’ obligations is complicated because a local community’s ability to meet their obligations to refugees will be partially dependent on what states do. If states refuse to meet their obligations to accept refugees, then local communities cannot work to be in good relation with those refugees. But at the same time, what states are likely to do is partially dependent on what states do. For instance, if local communities successfully work to change attitudes toward (actual and potential) refugees among their existing populations to be more positive, then states (at least those states that are responsive to their members’ attitudes) are more likely to be open to resettling refugees within their borders. So while local communities alone cannot solve the refugee crisis, they have an important role to play, in the sense that their response to actual and potential refugees can both influence states and, as I argue below, facilitate or obstruct refugees’ chances to live a minimally flourishing life. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to consider this point.

4. It is important to note at the outset that different local communities will be constrained in different ways depending on what resources are available to them and what kinds of external supports they have. For instance, a local community within the United States with a small refugee population is differently positioned, with respect to its obligations to refugees, than a local community in Lebanon that hosts a large refugee population. While my more theoretical comments are aimed at local communities in general, many of my specific practical comments are aimed squarely at local communities in the Global North. Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to clarify this point.


7. For a good discussion of the difficulties surrounding providing a definition of “refugee” and the importance of doing so, see David Miller, Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), ch. 5.


9. As Serena Parekh argues, in contemporary refugee camps, the occupants are regularly subjected to serious harms and wrongs, including ongoing severe human rights violations. As she says, such camps completely fail to provide meaningful refuge. Serena Parekh, No Refugee: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

31. TallBear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming,” 25, emphasis in original.
32. TallBear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming,” 29-32, emphasis in original.
33. TallBear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming,” 26; Bar On, “But is It Fascism?” 34.
34. TallBear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming,” 34-6.
35. Whether states have legitimate political authority is a separate question, and one I will not consider here. It is enough for my purposes to say that states could legally institute refugee aid and resettlement if they so desired.
37. You might worry that this means that refugees should never be resettled in communities with such bad communal ways of being, and that this has the implication that fewer refugees will be resettled overall. According to both international law and the settled ethics of refugee studies, refugees should not be resettled to unsafe places. So it is true that insofar as fascistic communities are deeply unsafe for those who do not fit their mythos, refugees should not be resettled to such communities. This would be akin to throwing refugees who have escaped the frying pan back into the fire. The exception might be if refugees happened to fit the fascistic community’s mythos; for instance, Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed in some far-right European countries in 2022, countries which have closed their borders to refugees from other parts of the world. This is only a possible exception though, because it is not clear that fascistic communities are ever safe and in good relation, even amongst themselves. Arendt and Bar On both would certainly deny such a claim. Ultimately, it is true that it is not acceptable to simply resettle refugees anywhere; to do so would be, in some cases, to expose them to serious potential future harms and wrongs. Refugees must be resettled in safe places where there is the potential for them to be in good relation with others. Hence, local communities’ social obligations to make themselves into such places if possible. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.
38. This is classically discussed in John Dewey, The School and Society, Rev. ed. (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1965, c1915).
40. Thank you to an anonymous referee, as well as the editors, for raising this point.
41. For some specific instances where community discussion groups have impacted local communal attitudes toward refugees in the United States, see the results of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Dialogues on the Experience of War program, which have been published by various grant awardees. https://www.neh.gov/grants/education/dialogues-the-experience-war.
43. Thanks to the editors and an anonymous referee for raising this concern.
44. This follows my interpretation and extrapolation of Bar On’s argument that actual social contexts set the conditions of possibility; even the behemoths that are the global media machines are ultimately rooted in the local.
47. Adichie, The Danger of a Single Story.
49. Of course, there is no guarantee that the provision of public green spaces, parks, or other community centers will work to forge the communal connections that I discuss here; but they open up relational possibilities in a way that local communities should be sensitive to and, furthermore, should take advantage of.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

I graduated with a PhD in philosophy from Binghamton University in May of 2001. Bat-Ami Bar On directed my dissertation, and she remained my mentor and friend until her death in November of 2020. Since Ami died, I have had several opportunities to reflect upon how she influenced my development as a feminist philosopher, as well as to engage with her scholarship from a new perspective. Good teachers do not simply impart knowledge. The way in which they do so models thinking that is critically engaged (not only with texts and other thinkers, but also with the world) for their students; good teachers act as exemplars in how to think. Since Ami was one of the best teachers I had, it therefore makes sense that reflecting on how she influenced me is interconnected with and necessarily entails engaging with her own thinking as it is reflected in her philosophical oeuvre. A particular passage from the Introduction to her 2002 book, The Subject of Violence, impressed upon me the complicated nature of this interconnection. Remarking upon how Hannah Arendt’s work influenced her, as well as her philosophical engagement with it, Bar On observes that both Arendt’s and her own work, while not overtly autobiographical, nonetheless emerge out of and therefore cannot help but reflect their respective lived experiences generally and their experiences of violence more specifically. At the same time, Bar On shares Arendt’s concern about having her work merely read through or even reduced to those experiences. “I would not,” Bar On writes, want other people to “intrude” into my “subjective” mental states and events, and I am quite anxious about others’ readings of me that would connect my work to my experience of violence as a Jewish Israeli. On the one hand, this is . . . an essential connection. On the other hand, this is not a connection that can be construed causally. It is an “intrusion” ending in a causal, and therefore, deterministic construction that I would take as most disrespectful. As haunted as I am by my experiences of violence, I am not just their product, and my work does not simply flow out of my experiences of violence.5

This passage gave me pause. In rereading Ami’s work, I have found myself not only thinking about and analyzing our respective feminist philosophical perspectives on violence, but also wondering about the origins of those differences. Arendt’s work on violence also shapes my own in important ways, and it was Ami who introduced me to Arendt. Yet we draw upon different aspects of Arendt’s work which we in turn interpret differently and deploy in the service of arguments which, while not opposing, are not obviously compatible, either. There is really nothing surprising about the fact that a student does not take the same stance on thinkers and problems their teacher does (in fact, Ami would have wanted that to be the case) or that philosophers read the same texts and come away with (sometimes radically) different interpretations of them. But because it was only shortly before Ami died that I started working on violence from the position of one who has, as she states in the epigraph one ought to do, let herself be affected by it, I didn’t get to have the kind of conversations

“Violent Bodies”: Two Feminist Perspectives

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When we women find the courage to defend ourselves, to take a stand against brutality and abuse, we are violating every notion of womanhood we have ever been taught. The way to freedom for women is bound to be torturous for that reason alone.1

— Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating

[T]o do justice to violence, one ought to let oneself be affected by it.2

— Bat-Ami Bar On, The Subject of Violence


with Ami about violence that I would have liked to have had. Attributing our different perspectives to our experiences may in a sense help to fill that gap, and in doing so also alleviate the increased sense of loss the absence of those conversations leaves, but, as Ami reminds us, that sort of speculation opens the door to reductive and indeed unethical readings of thinkers and their work.

This essay’s analysis of Ami’s and my divergent views on whether and how violence can be deployed in the service of emancipatory feminist projects therefore focuses not on the origins of these views, but on their implications for feminism and feminist thought generally, and feminist resistance to sexual violence more specifically. In what follows, I unpack Ami’s analysis of the ethicopolitics of violent embodied feminist resistance against sexual violence as she presents it in Chapter Seven, “Violent Bodies,” of The Subject of Violence. Offering support for her perspective on such deployment while also distinguishing my own stance from hers, I show that Ami and I read Arendt’s text, On Violence, differently, and that our respective appeals to other philosophical influences overlap and diverge as well. Ultimately, I endorse a broader use of violence against sexist oppression and with less hesitation and ambivalence than, on my reading, Ami does. Both of us, however, share the conviction that violent embodied feminist resistance needs to be practiced (self)critically and (self)reflectively in solidarity with other feminists.

PERSPECTIVE 1: BAT-AMI BAR ON

The whole of Bat-Ami Bar On’s work confronts and grapples with, rather than resists or denies or seeks to overcome, the ambiguity of existence as conceived by Simone de Beauvoir. Bar On acknowledges and keeps in play the fact that humans are, as Arendt puts it, “unique distinct” beings who are nonetheless bound to other people within the context of a shared world; we are, Beauvoir tells us, simultaneously of “sovereign importance” and “insignificant.”5 That Bar On “assumes” (as Beauvoir puts it) ambiguity in turn contributes to the simultaneously aspirational and unequivocally pragmatic character of her philosophy: her work engages the world as it is, even as it seeks to transform it. This aspirational pragmatism is reflected in Bar On’s approach to the questions concerning the ethicopolitics of violence and its deployment that preoccupied her throughout her philosophical career. She writes in the Preface to The Subject of Violence that she came to consider violence as “one of [her] life’s conditions.”6 Her point here, as she goes on to explain, is not that violence is “determinative” of her conditions of existence, but rather that it is “always there and necessarily reacted to.”7 Much of Bar On’s work focuses on questions of violence as they emerge within the context of armed conflicts such as genocide, terrorism, and war, and these themes are woven into the earlier chapters of The Subject of Violence. My current focus on the role violence can play within feminist resistance to sexual violence makes me especially interested in the analysis Bar On provides in “Violent Bodies.”

In that chapter, Bar On argues from an Arendtian perspective that cultivating what she refers to as “violent women bodies” can be ethically and politically justified if, first, its nature and scope are narrowly defined and, second, if it is undertaken as part of an overall feminist project aimed at countering men’s systemic gender-based sexual violence against women. She conceives of a violent body specifically as one that is “habituated to use violence or, more precisely, a body habituated to act violently.”8 Violent women bodies of course have to be cultivated, because normative gender constitutes women’s bodies (and therefore women themselves) as nonviolent and even passive. Given the interconnection of the relation of self to self with relations to others and world, women in turn constitute (to at least some extent and in different ways) their embodied self-relation in terms of these same sexist norms. Simone de Beauvoir, in The Second Sex, describes how boys “undergo a veritable apprenticeship in violence” while girls decidedly do not.9 “[C]onquering actions,” Beauvoir writes, “are not permitted to the girl, and violence in particular is not permitted to her.”10 Sharon Marcus elaborates on Beauvoir’s point when she argues that whereas men are constituted and in turn constitute themselves as subjects of violence, women are construed as targets of (men’s) violence and therefore constitute, understand, and relate to themselves (to at least some extent and in different ways) as “subjects of fear.”11 This mode of self-relation (greatly) inhibits women’s ability to physically retaliate in the face of an attack. “Feminine fear,” Marcus argues, stems from, reproduces, and intensifies women’s experience of their embodiment (and therefore themselves) as “universally vulnerable, lacking force, and incompetent to supplement” their bodies and resulting embodied “deficiencies.”12

In light of the pervasiveness of sexual violence, structural and institutional ineffectiveness and social apathy in the face of it, and the extent to which normative gendering leaves women ill-equipped to defend themselves or otherwise retaliate, cultivating violent women bodies would appear (arguably, quite obviously) to be not only necessary but also, insofar as it opposes a definitive form of the violence that characterizes gender oppression, justifiable on both political and ethical grounds. On Bar On’s view, though, the situation is more complicated. In what she describes as both an individual and national (and therefore collective) “project,” Bar On relates that she began cultivating her own violent body as a Jewish Israeli child. Contra to the dictates of normative femininity, Bar On played “war games” with the other children in her neighborhood, as well as within the more formal context of “youth movements,” where such games were used to teach physical and cognitive “skills.”13 Bar On’s “apprenticeship in violence” did not end when she reached puberty. She underwent military training in Israel and later took up martial arts in conjunction with her involvement in the US feminist movement. Being schooled in violence, constituting herself as a violent woman body, does not, however, lead Bar On to uncritically endorse doing so as a feminist strategy of resistance. She expresses if not ambivalence then at least caution about women habituating themselves in the use of violence, even for the purposes of self-defense. This more guarded stance stems in part from the fact that Bar On’s own experience has made clear to her that only a “very thin” line can be drawn between a body that is able and prepared to act violently (a “ready-to-fight body”) and one that actually does so—a “fighting body,” as it were. Even this thinnest of lines, Bar On
acknowledges, may be impossible to maintain in practice, but she wants to at least try to maintain it, in part because she worries that women’s embodied habituation toward violence may unintentionally reproduce conditions for the possibility of the very violence that their ready-to-fight bodies are intended to counter. “How can I not be seriously troubled,” Bar On writes, “by my continued engagement in the maintenance and reproduction of my body when many feminists are very critical and suspicious of violent bodies seeing, just as I do, violent men’s bodies as the primary implement of violence in the everyday kinds of violence that women experience, such as rape and battering, as well as in war?”

Even if it is the case that ready-to-fight bodies are in some sense always and at the same time fighting bodies—if, in other words, the violence of the ready-to-fight body is indistinguishable from or at least bound up with that of the fighting body—from Bar On’s perspective cultivating a violent woman body (and therefore engaging in the practice of violence) can still be an ethicopolitical project provided that it is circumscribed in two ways. First, the violent body must be a solely defensive one, as Bar On puts it, the body’s violence must be “limited temporally and in its scope.” As Bar On shows, Arendt considered self-defense to be “ethicopolitically unproblematic” because it is an immediate response to an immediate threat. “The farther . . . the intended end” of violence “recedes into the future,” Arendt writes, the more the use of violence “loses its plausibility.” The second way in which cultivating violent women bodies can be ethicopolitically justifiable is if that cultivation is specifically feminist in character. According to Bar On, from an Arendtian perspective, this criterion conflicts with the first. Arendt did not, she asserts, consider relations of domination and subordination to be political, with the result that she would not have seen defensive violence deployed in order to combat oppression as political, either. For her, women defending themselves against practices like rape and sexual assaulted that stem from and reproduce gender oppression would be self-interested.

And yet Bar On argues that, paradoxically, cultivating violent women bodies can be ethicopolitically justifiable—from an Arendtian perspective, no less—only if it takes place within the context of the broader project of feminism. Aspects of feminist self-defense, she shows, are in fact political on Arendt’s terms. Arendt defines politics as human beings coming together for the purposes of action and speech, and cultivating a violent woman body within the context of feminist self-defense training is, Bar On contends, undertaken as part of a collective project of “acting in concert.” The fact that cultivating a violent, feminist, woman body is transgressive also makes it political from an Arendtian perspective. For Arendt, action is political precisely because it is spontaneous and, therefore, characteristically “unpredictable and unreliable.” Action is never determined by the conditions and contexts within which it occurs; it creates something new and, therefore, does not respect existing boundaries. On this basis, cultivating a violent, feminist, woman body is transgressive in two ways. First, as discussed above, it transgresses normative femininity. “If what political action is about is the interruption of the status quo,” Bar On writes, “then it seems that there is no need to worry about the transgressive excess of the feminist actions that bring into being violent women bodies”—about, that is, women’s bodies becoming unfeminine and, therefore, “what they are not supposed to be.” Second, cultivating a violent, feminist, woman body transgresses its own feminist frame. Their feminist character may provide violent women bodies with their ethicopolitical justification, but their cultivation cannot be completely determined by and therefore reduced to and contained within a feminist frame. Like Arendt, Bar On cautions that, as a form of action, violence is characteristically unpredictable. Its effects can never be fully anticipated and, despite our best efforts to circumscribe it in the ways Arendt and Bar On describe—that is, to limit it to an immediate response to a specific action or event—violence still has the potential to break loose from the boundaries of its intended aims and objectives and, as Bar On puts it, “run amok.” She thus concludes “Violent Bodies” by emphasizing that any feminist project of self-defense needs to be undertaken in (self)critical ways that mediate against the always-present possibility of feminist violence devolving into oppressive violence. “A feminist,” she writes, “must concern herself with quite complex questions about the possibility that as women’s bodies become habituated to violent action, they may act in ways that ‘inhumanely’ and ‘destructively’ transgress the boundaries that are specified by an ethicopolitical justification for the action that they are undertaking.”

I do not disagree with Ami’s perspective in “Violent Bodies.” My own perspective diverges from hers, however, and it does so specifically in ways that open onto and promote a broader feminist deployment of violence in the face of systemic rape and sexual assault—feminist deployment, that is, of what I refer to as counter-violence. For reasons I will discuss, I am less concerned than Ami is about delineating in advance an ethicopolitical justification for feminist counter-violence. At the same time, I do share her view that how violence affects those who exercise it, as well as its broader ramifications, needs to be acknowledged and grappled with. I also do not think that it is necessary to limit in advance the form that feminist counter-violence may take; I do not think, that is, that the only ethical form of feminist counter-violence is defensive. While defensive violence may be the most appropriate response in some (perhaps many or even most) situations, I think there are other situations in which pre-emptive counter-violence is both called for and ethical.

PERPECTIVE 2: DIANNA TAYLOR

Ami knew Arendt’s work better than I do. I therefore do not intend to call into question (in the sense of mounting a critique of it) her reading that from an Arendtian perspective only defensively violent feminist women bodies can be ethicopolitically justified. At the same time, I do have questions (which I would love to be able to unpack with Ami) concerning how to square that particular Arendtian perspective with other remarks Arendt makes in On Violence, remarks that inform my own views about feminist counter-violence. Unlike Bar On, I do not approach Arendt’s work on violence from the vantage point of her views on self-defense; rather, I approach it from the perspective
of what she says about rage. That this is the case is not coincidental, because I posit rage as the definitive affective response to oppression, and thus by extension oppressive violence.

Arendt sees rage opening onto but not necessarily generating violent action. In Part III of On Violence, she reflects that, in part because of its association with violence, rage is pathologized. Acknowledging that rage can indeed be irrational and pathological, Arendt nonetheless contends that the same is true for “every other human affect.” She points out, moreover, that absence of affective responses should not be equated with the presence of rationality. Insofar as they are reactions, all human responses, including those characterized as rational and therefore reasonable, express that one has been affected or “moved” by something or someone. It is therefore a lack of the capacity to respond and subsequently be moved that Arendt identifies as pathological; for her, this lack signifies “a perversion of feeling.” Like all affective responses, rage must be generated or provoked. It does not emerge automatically and cannot therefore simply be deemed “natural” and left unexamined. To what, then, is rage a response—what (or who) provokes it? Not, Arendt argues, “misery and suffering.” Human beings do not, she asserts, generally or primarily respond with rage in the face of natural disasters, for example. Within the devastating misery and suffering of Nazi extermination and concentration camps, moreover, the pathological effects of “dehumanization” were reflected not in “rage and violence” but rather in their “conspicuous absence.”

For Arendt, rage rather emerges in response to injustice, which she construes in terms of contexts and situations in which “there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not”—when, in other words, prevailing conditions are taken to be necessary conditions. She states, “[o]nly when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage.”

Arendt describes the violence that, she emphasizes, may but need not stem from rage in very different terms from the narrowly circumscribed, ethicopolitically justified violence of self-defense: “[U]nder certain circumstances,” she writes,

violence—acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences—is the only way to set the scales of justice right again. . . . In this sense, rage and the violence that sometimes—not always—goes with it belong among the “natural” human emotions, and to cure man of them would mean nothing less than to dehumanize . . . him.

The first part of this passage asserts that in some situations, a violent response is simply required; arguing that in such instances violence is the only way to right injustice, moreover, appears to suggest that the usual required justifications for its use (such as that it be an immediate response to an imminent threat) may not (do not?) apply. The second part of the passage asserts that because, absent violent intervention, injustice will prevail in some situations, not permitting rage to actualize, and therefore by extension repressing counter-violence, is dehumanizing. Arendt’s perspective here resonates quite strongly with Beauvoir’s as she expresses it in The Second Sex. “Violence,” Beauvoir writes,

is the authentic test of every person’s attachment to himself, his passions, and his own will; to radically reject it is to reject all objective truth, it is to isolate one’s self in an abstract subjectivity; an anger or a revolt that does not exert itself in muscles remain imaginary. It is a terrible frustration not to be able to imprint the movements of one’s heart on the face of the earth.

Bar On cites this passage as part of her illustration of how cultivating a violent woman body transgresses normative femininity. I see Beauvoir making a more fundamental point here, though; namely, that the human capacity for violence figures centrally in shaping how we constitute, understand, and relate to ourselves. The way in which we relate to that capacity (and therefore to ourselves) therefore by extension shapes how we relate to others and the world. To say that violence is constitutive in this way is not to say that human beings are inherently violent. Rather, Beauvoir sees violence as an unavoidable effect of the tension and conflict that characterize an existence that is both ambiguous and collective. That violence also characterizes an existence that is human means that denying certain groups the ability to actualize their capacity for it by, for example, pathologizing their violence and thus fostering modes of self-relation in which they experience their own capacity for it as pathological, denies those groups access to the full range of experiences through which freedom may be actualized. In other words, repressing violence, especially in the face of injustice, is dehumanizing not because it violates some essential quality that defines humanity, but rather because it curtails and even denies the freedom that characterizes a human existence. The fact that Arendt places scare quotes around the word “natural” when referring to violence as a human capacity reflects the fact that she too rejects the idea that it is an inherent quality. Like Beauvoir, she sees violence as an effect of lived experience, an aspect of which is the experience of injustice she describes.

How can these two quite different Arendtian perspectives on and accounts of violence, one narrowly circumscribed and limited in scope, the other a broad response to an equally broad conceptualization of injustice, be reconciled? According to Arendt herself, the latter, rageful, violence may not be irrational, but neither is it political. She associates rageful violence with “acts . . . in which men take the law into their own hands for justice’s sake” and describes it as being “in conflict with the constitutions of civilized communities.” Just as Bar On reads Arendt against herself in arguing that only as feminist can women’s defensive violence be political, I want to suggest that rageful violence as a response to injustice can be seen, on Arendt’s own terms, to possess at least ethicopolitical potential. A whole host of situations and scenarios could fall under the auspices of “taking prevailing conditions to be necessary conditions” and therefore be construed as unjust in an Arendtian sense. It is noteworthy, however, that Arendt associated both presenting and uncritically accepting prevailing conditions as necessary ones with totalitarianism.
Totalitarian regimes presented their worldview as a natural and therefore inevitable order of things; they capitalized on and in turn fostered nontinking, which entails “holding fast to whatever the prescribed rules of conduct may be at a given time in a given society.” The fact that Arendt cites “rebellion” and “revolution” as expressions of rage and violence in the face of injustice suggests, moreover, that unjust situations include those in which change is not only possible but needed, precisely because (as in the case of totalitarianism) prevailing conditions are harmful or destructive and therefore not merely accepted as necessary but rather imposed and enforced. Ultimately, that Arendt describes injustice and totalitarianism, the most antipolitical of ideologies, in similar terms suggests to me that at least some manifestations of injustice are themselves antipolitical. In such cases, opposing injustice through rageful violence—the only way to overcome it—could function in the same way she argues that thinking does “in the rare moments where the chips are down.” Through facilitating critical questioning of and refusal to go along with the status quo, thinking paves the way for judging, which Arendt describes as the political faculty par excellence. Thinking “deals with invisibles” but judging engages the world, precisely as it is. Rageful violence similarly refuses to accept the status quo; it may therefore, in some contexts, pave the way for political activity.

In my view, then, it’s possible to read Arendt offering a broader ethicopolitical justification for multiple manifestations of counter-violence to oppose sexual violence, one that extends beyond the merely defensive. But even if Arendt does not provide the grounds for such justification, the work of other thinkers affords insight into a different sort of ethical and political validation of counter-violence. My own analyses of counter-violence generally and feminist counter-violence more specifically are grounded in the tradition of critical phenomenology. My perspectives are shaped most strongly by Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon, but I also draw upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, of course, Arendt herself. Michel Foucault’s work frames my understanding of the nature and function of power relations within contemporary Western societies. Like Beauvoir and Fanon (as well as Arendt and Bar On), I understand violence to be a manifestation of the human capacity for action. Also consistent with critical phenomenology is my view of violence as an embodied violation that inflicts harm against both the physical and lived bodies. Oppressive violence as I understand it is generated within and functions to both reproduce and enforce systems of oppression—systems characterized by conditions under which the exercise of freedom by some groups systematically denies the freedom of others. Under conditions of oppression, some groups are deeply constrained in their ability to shape their conditions of existence, in part because they are, as Judith Butler puts it, “differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.” Counter-violence is enacted, both individually and collectively, by bodies against other bodies. It manifests as an embodied mode of self-relation that is committed to putting itself in the way of oppressive violence and, therefore, to striking back against it. By circumventing, disrupting, or even preventing the actualization of the oppressive violence upon which they rely, counter-violence undermines oppressive systems. In responding to oppressive violence, moreover, counter-violence exposes it, thereby opening it up to interrogation and protest; in effect, it redirects oppressive violence back against its (individual and systemic) sources. Ultimately, by exposing oppressive violence for what it is, especially when undertaken collectively, counter-violence has the potential to disrupt the reproduction of oppressive conditions more broadly, as well as to foster solidarity among the oppressed.

Approaching counter-violence through the work of Beauvoir and Fanon reduces (but does not remove) concern about the ethicopolitics of counter-violence. They (and Merleau-Ponty) are firm in their stance that counter-violence needs to be part of resistance against oppressive systems (for them, fascism and colonialism) that rely upon violence for their reproduction—systems for which, in other words, violence is not merely an effect but also a condition of possibility. In the face of oppression, Beauvoir writes, “the oppressed has only one solution: to deny the harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is made to exclude him, to prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolting.” Revolt is ethical because it (re)establishes reciprocity among human beings, it restores the ambiguity of existence and with it the conditions for the possibility of freedom. As the passage cited earlier from The Second Sex makes clear, to be a meaningful actualization of human freedom this revolt must manifest in the body; it must be a “muscular revolt.” From a specifically feminist critical phenomenological perspective, then, feminist counter-violence takes the form of embodied responses to the (sexual) violence that grounds, reproduces, reinforces, minimizes, and thus legitimizes gender oppression. My understanding of gender oppression affirms my belief that a broader use of feminist counter-violence, a use that extends beyond self-defense, is both ethical and politically necessary. As I see it, normative (binary) gender is an oppressive system. Violent gendered relations of power ground and are reproduced through major social and political institutions, including those which function as resources for victims/survivors: law enforcement, courts of law, social services. Gendered and sexual violence ground and are in turn reproduced through fundamental social structures and institutions; these forms of violence are socially and politically legitimated. Designed to deal with violence after the fact, official, institutional interventions can at best (and often not especially effectively) manage gendered and sexual violence; casting prevailing conditions as necessary, they do virtually nothing to prevent it. The vast majority of feminists, in contrast, promote prevention and, ultimately, eradication of oppressive gendered and sexual violence. In addition to Sharon Marcus, contemporary feminist scholars such as Ann Cahill (2009) and Martha McCaughey (1997) make a strong case for the potential to feminist self-defense to facilitate these objectives—as did Beauvoir herself. “Men use violence against women in their language as well as in their gestures,” Beauvoir observes. “They assault women: they rape them, insult them, and certain looks are aggressions. Women must equally defend themselves with violence.”
Self-defense, of course, falls within the limitations Bar On advocates concerning the use of feminist counter-violence. It is actualized in response to an immediate attack in the moment when it occurs. My view of normative gender as an oppressive system points to the need for additional, broader, pre-emptive feminist strategies within which counter-violence may be deployed. Such strategies, including but not limited to those aimed at reclaiming and transforming public space and those targeting known violent men, were developed within the antirape wing of the US Women’s Liberation Movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Elements of these strategies, provided they are developed from an intersectional perspective, could prove effective within a contemporary context. The impulse to reject such actions as vigilantism (as Arendt seems to do) needs to be resisted, especially given the reality that when it comes to violence against women, the law functions as what Foucault describes as a productive failure: sexual and intimate partner violence law fails if we see its aim as serving victims/survivors; when it comes to reproducing oppressive gendered relations of power, it succeeds. In the face of such productive failure, I identify interesting possibilities for coalition among, for example, feminist counter-violence advocates and anticarceral feminists.

CONCLUSION

The more assertive attitude toward counter-violence reflected in Arendt’s conceptualization of rageful violence and the work of Beauvoir, Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, and myself is no less assertively (self)critical than that which is reflected in Arendt’s and Bar On’s support for defensive violence. Arendt’s view of injustice, and oppression as conceived within critical phenomenology, are quite general phenomena; this leaves individuals and groups in a position of needing to determine for themselves whether and how counter-violence can be effectively and ethically deployed. Arguably, then, an assertive attitude toward counter-violence requires even more intense scrutiny and critical evaluation concerning its use and effects. Like the thinkers whose work influences my own consideration of the matter of counter-violence, I am not offering it as a solution to the problem of oppressive violence, nor am I (or they) arguing that it can or should be used by all oppressed people in all situations. My point is, rather, that counter-violence should not be uncritically rejected as merely oppressive, that it needs to be distinguished from oppressive violence, and that it needs to be on the table as one possible way in which revolt against oppression can be expressed. Beauvoir, Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, and Bar On all leave their readers to grapple with how to live in a world where this need is a reality, a world in which oppressive violence continues unabated in forms that are sometimes more virulent, sometimes more subtle, and increasingly unanticipated. In short, our situation continues to require, as Arendt wrote in 1950, “unpremeditated, attentive facing up to and resisting of reality—whatever it may be.”

This is a world and a reality that require coming together and acting in concert to oppose oppression and injustice, and doing so in ways that do not collapse but rather foreground, assert, and bring into conversation an ever-changing variety of ways of being in the world. In a contribution to a symposium on Sandra Bartky’s book Femininity and Domination, in the feminist philosophy journal, Hypatia, Bar On writes that she sees Bartky appealing to both identification and critical consciousness as bases for feminism. Identification invokes “a feeling of a more or less cathartic connection with others that affirms things about what one takes oneself to be while giving one the deep sense and satisfaction that because of these things one belongs.” Again echoing Arendt, this time in The Origins of Totalitarianism, Bar On worries about the broad antipolitical implications of the tendency to posit some aspect of who we are, and which we in turn identify in others, as the basis for coming together with them. She writes that this impulse has a “lulling” effect which, similar to what Nietzsche refers to as “peace of soul,” fosters complacency and obedience (or at least surrender in the face of perplexity) and therefore leads us to simply resign ourselves to prevailing sociopolitical conditions.

It would thus appear that we should reject identification in favor of the critical consciousness that emerges from the experiences of alienation and estrangement. But this isn’t Bar On’s view. It is precisely Bartky’s “eclecticism,” her willingness to risk attachments, Bar On writes, that facilitates identification with her as a thinker and thus with her feminist project more broadly. The line between bodies that enforce and those which oppose oppression, between oppressive violence and counter-violence may indeed be thin. But Bar On is right that it cannot be maintained if feminist debate about “what is at issue and at stake” with respect to the “active configuration of violent bodies” is simply foreclosed. She shows, and I agree with her, that both engaging questions about the ethics and politics of feminist counter-violence and engaging in that violence itself need to be undertaken thoughtfully and self-critically, as well as collectively and in solidarity with other feminists.

NOTES

1. Dworkin, Woman Hating, 23.
2. I find Bar On’s wording here interesting. What does it mean to “do justice” to violence? I’ve understood her to be saying that one needs to critically engage it in order to promote understanding, but this is something I would have liked to ask her about.
3. When referring to Ami as my teacher, mentor, and friend, I refer to her by her first name. When analyzing her work, I will revert to the academic practice of referring to her by her last name.
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20. In The Human Condition, Arendt describes both action and, insofar as it is characterized by action, the entire "realm of human affairs" in these terms. See Arendt, The Human Condition, especially Part V.
21. As Dworkin makes clear in the epigraph, transgressing gender norms is both fraught and risky.
25. In The Subject of Violence, Bar On’s analysis of violence as a whole is framed in terms of the experience of trauma. Earlier chapters of The Subject of Violence refer to texts in which Arendt describes and analyzes the traumatic experiences (including her own) of refugees and stateless persons during World War II. In my view, this framing in turn shapes how Bar On approaches On Violence, as is also the case with my own analysis of violence in terms of oppression and rage shaping how I read that text.
28. Arendt, On Violence, 64.
29. Arendt, On Violence, 64.
34. Arendt, On Violence, 63.
35. Arendt, On Violence, 64. It is interesting to me that Ami doesn’t cite this section of On Violence in “Violent Bodies.” Maybe she simply interpreted it differently. Maybe it didn’t catch her attention because she doesn’t approach Arendt’s work on violence through her remarks about rage. Still, it seems to me that Ami must have noted the similarities between this passage from On Violence and the one from The Second Sex, and so I wonder, why Beauvoir and not (also) Arendt?
37. Arendt, On Violence, 64.
38. Arendt, On Violence, 64.
40. Arendt, On Violence, 63.
42. Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 425.
43. This is Beauvoir’s definition of oppression in The Ethics of Ambiguity: "freedom which is interested only in denying freedom." See Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 91.
44. Butler, Frames of War, 25. Butler refers to this differential exposure as “precarity.”

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“Mere Talk,” Accountability, and Repair: Arendt and Bar on on Civility
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For the Greeks to fight justly against each other meant not destroying the conditions of the possibility of talking with each other and, therefore, preserving the most basic conditions of the possibility of politics and especially some version of democratic politics. . . . I think of politics agonally and democratically, and so have come to appreciate the Greek commitment to the preservation of the conditions that make talk possible.

— Bat-Ami Bar On

for Ami, with gratitude
1. INTRODUCTION
For Hannah Arendt, the political realm is both constituted by and intended for “the sharing of words and deeds”; thus, we become political when we create spaces where we can negotiate with others who may be very different from us. Arendt’s understanding of politics is deeply relational; in her discussion of the Greeks, she notes that, strictly speaking, the polis is not the physical city state, but rather the organizations and relationships in the spaces created by political speech and action. Given this emphasis on political speech—and given Arendt’s enthusiastic engagement with Roman as well as Hellenistic political traditions—it makes sense to reflect on recent debates over the nature and value of civility (derived, as it is, from the Roman concept of what befits and is owed to a fellow citizen) through the lens of Arendt’s reflections on the value and vulnerabilities of political speech.

Similarly, when rereading Arendt scholar Bat-Ami Bar On’s rich and provocative opus of political and philosophical writing, I am always drawn to her reflections on the power of politico-expressive speech and actions:

[Political] protest, exactly because of its display of political power, can remind people that the form of their collective life is always open to political negotiations and revisions, as well as that they can come together with others and be political agents of change.1

In this paper, I sketch an approach to political civility that is both Arendtian and Bar Onian in spirit, drawing on Bar On’s reflection in the epigraph above: that she had “come to appreciate the Greek commitment to the preservation of the conditions that make talk possible.” If there is a salvageable notion of civility—one that can be rescued from its deeply embedded history of racism and classism and sexism and ableism and exclusion and xenophobia and gatekeeping and silencing and so on—it may well be this: political civility, at its best, is nothing more or less than the practices, values, norms, habits, and institutions we put into place—i.e., the conditions—that continue to make talk possible. Rather than fencing off what is unspeakable, inappropriate, and unfit for the podium or dinner table, or establishing a set of insider rules that mark the elite from the uncouth, we can instead understand civility as at least some aspect of what we need to first ground and then maintain a public space conducive to talking through the most difficult things together, even across vast and substantive political differences (in Arendt’s language, plurality) and in the face of real conflict. Such spaces (and the relationships they create) are integral to the world’s oldest democracies, from the Haudenosaunee longhouse to the Greek polis. They are also central to Arendt and Bar On’s political writing, as well as that of Bar On’s former student, philosopher Jessica Vargas Gonzalez, who describes them as engendering mediated relationships of civic care.2

My argumentative strategy is as follows: first, I address legitimate critiques of civility raised in recent years, and offer some reasons for optimism, in light of my proposed reframing. An approach that draws on these two thinkers, I suggest, would have small but significant differences from both the “tolerate the intolerable” and “punch up, kiss down” approaches to civility. These differences argue in its favor. Second, I draw on Arendt’s and Bar On’s thinking to highlight markers for recognizing when efforts at civility go right or wrong, that is, when they are wielded either in the service of democratic politics and civic care, or as a way to shut them down. These markers are drawn from Arendt’s generative discussion of action in The Human Condition, specifically: her account of promising—that is, our capacity to be accountable and to hold one another accountable; her account of forgiveness—that is, our capacity to work toward repair; and her references to the conditions under which meaningful political speech descends into meaningless “mere talk.” In framing the normativity of civility in terms of accountability and repair, I am echoing Arendt’s claim that the only two natural limits on the freedom of political action—the only ones not applied to action from the outside—are our capacity for promising and forgiving. Indeed, this resonates with Bar On’s cautions about seeking outside (i.e., purely ethical) limits to political conduct:

I am not comfortable with a response to this problem [of evil] that posits morality or ethics in a regulative or even constructive role in relation to politics.3

I do not think that politics can or ought to be subsumed under ethics.4

Further, I believe that the concepts of accountability and repair may be critical when identifying misuses and abuses: instances when civility is used to shut down the possibility of meaningful speech, rather than facilitating it. Characteristically, abuses of civility are those instances that claim the high ground (i.e., upholding apparent standards of civil discourse or politeness) while refusing to be accountable to one’s interlocutor(s) and failing to consider what might be needed for repair.

Finally, understanding Arendt’s reference to “mere talk” as a degradation of genuine political speech is also useful in this regard, though I am mindful of Arendt’s warnings against any effort to find a permanent solution to the fragility of political spaces and political action. Indeed, her remarks on morality at the end of the chapter on Action might well apply to civility:

Insofar as morality [civility] is more than the sum total of mores, of customs and standards of behaviour solidified through tradition and valid on the grounds of agreements, both of which change with time, it has, at least politically, no more to support itself than the good will to counter the enormous risks of action by readiness to forgive and to be forgiven, to make promises and to keep them.5

If we cannot generate an account of civility that is immune to abuse and exploitation, we can—at the least—gesture to one with some tools for identifying its own misuse.
2. THE CASE AGAINST CIVILITY

Critics of civility are not hard to find. Alex Zamalin put the case bluntly: “civility is a central term through which racial inequality has been maintained . . . exalted in the language of slaveholders, segregationists, lynch mobs, and eugenicists.” Similarly, Nora Berenstain invokes civility’s disturbing history, noting that “civility has a long, ugly, and well-documented history that contemporary calls for civility obscure,” tying it to the European “civilizing project” of global violence and genocide, and noting that even in the present, challenges to the status quo by the marginalized and oppressed are always more likely to be seen as “uncivil.”

Linda Zerilli remarks, somewhat wryly, that “disenfranchised minorities such as women and African Americans have been regularly accused of incivility just by virtue of daring to show up in public and press their rights claims.” Moreover, as Alison Reiheld notes, these very real problems are exacerbated by the tendency to “[toss the term] around with uncritical abandon in public discourse.”

What, exactly, is the target of these critics’ ire? If we return to the Roman origins of the word, as that which is both owed to and befits a citizen of the state, civility refers to any number of virtues including tolerance, nonviolence, cooperation, a certain civic-mindedness and even neighborliness, as well as a healthy respect for the rights and privacy of others. Indeed, civility is a virtue in both the public and private realm, overlapping with broad practices of politeness, good manners, and even etiquette. Of course, the use of “citizen” here—easily contrasted with outsider, foreigner, and slave—may already raise some hackles, and rightly so.

In both philosophical and public debates, moreover, civility is most often understood as a set of constraints on speech. For Rawls, the duty of civility requires that we justify our actions and decisions by reference only to public values and standards and that we refrain from citing our private, comprehensive beliefs—which may not be shared by our interlocutor or our fellow citizens. Mark Kingwell also highlights the importance of holding one’s tongue, especially when our deeply held convictions might be offensive, hurtful, or a conversation stopper. Cheshire Calhoun understands civility as a communicative virtue, one that allows us to express moral attitudes of respect, consideration, and tolerance in contexts governed by social norms. For Calhoun, a civil response is owed to all one’s interlocutors and opponents, except for those who hold and express views outside a society-wide moral consensus.

In other words, we must tolerate the intolerant and even the intolerable, at least until everyone else agrees to find them so. Among these philosophical accounts, Calhoun’s fits best with wider, public connotations: we show civility when we are courteous and polite to others—even those we dislike or disagree with—thus expressing respect and consideration. Adam Serwer is more succinct: one common definition is simply “not being an asshole.”

Understanding civility as an external constraint on political speech helps to make sense of critics’ concerns. Even Amy Olberding, herself a proponent of civility, acknowledges that “the command to ‘be civil’ can operate as a way to insist that we accept the world just as it is, without protest or complaint.” Socially disruptive practices of incivility and rudeness, on the other hand, aim to shake up the status quo—interrupting the meeting, boycotting the event, disputing the dominant narrative, calling out hypocrisy, jumping in to speak truth to power—and, insofar as these actions challenge socially normative expectations about who should speak to whom, and how, they are far more likely to come across as rude. There is an inherent conservatism to most measures of civility: if rudeness means being treated with less respect than you are entitled to, then people who are already conditioned to think they are disproportionately entitled to others’ respect will see almost all challenges to that entitlement as rude. Again, Serwer is succinct on this point: “the second [definition of civility] is ‘I can do what I want and you can shut up’.”

In other words, civility’s regrettable history with unjust oppression and domination is hardly coincidental. If Calhoun is right and we owe everyone a civil response on issues where we have not yet achieved social consensus, then her view would insist that enslaved persons remain respectful and polite to pre-Civil War defenders of slavery, even in the face of their own dehumanization. In Macalaster Bell’s words, “when a person lives in a world where social closure on the intolerability of some intolerable practice has not yet been achieved, she must choose between being civil and acting with integrity.” Sometimes the intolerable is just that: intolerable. The demand that political disagreement be governed by civility controls not only how things are said—but ultimately, what can be said and, thus, who can speak. There are some claims and experiences that simply cannot be effectively communicated apart from expressive anger and accusation; it is hardly controversial to suggest that the evils of chattel slavery are among them.

Moreover, if their testimony cannot be shared intact, the participants who carry these experiences cannot fully participate in the conversation. “Civility” becomes little more than a set of norms to keep an unjust playing field tilted towards the status quo, with proponents and beneficiaries of the status quo—that is, those least provoked by it—as gatekeepers to the game. Indeed, adherents to civility are reminiscent of the white moderate in Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letters from Birmingham Jail” who is more of a stumbling block to freedom than the Ku Klux Klan, precisely because they are “more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice.”

It is not hard to imagine what Arendt and Bar On might have to say about this form of civility, given their shared commitment to meaningful political speech, political freedoms, and the political responsibility we have to hold evildoers accountable. While Arendt holds that political spaces are defined by the use of speech rather than violence, she nevertheless admits that these spaces are “highly individualistic” and agonistic, defined by constant debate and contestation—certainly not limited to polite dinner conversation or Robert’s Rules of Order. The sheer fact of human plurality (difference) makes such contestation not only inevitable but something to be celebrated; the chance to make one’s case and persuade others represents the highest possibility of political freedom. Moreover, Arendt cites multiple instances of protest and revolution as the highest examples of meaningful political action, including
both the American Revolution and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956—when student protestors broke into a state radio station, calling on fellow citizens to rise up and protest ongoing Soviet occupation. Arendt was clearly willing to endorse far more than polite disagreement in the face of tyranny or totalitarianism, opening On Revolution with the claim:

No cause is left but the most ancient of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history has determined the very existence of politics, the cause of freedom versus tyranny.\[32\]

Similarly, Bar On celebrated contestatory action in multiple forms. Indeed, one of her most fascinating discussions of the topic can be found in a critique of Iris Marion Young on protest. Bar On suggests that Young is too anxious to turn direct action into a form of speech, “a move intended to create an equivalence between the protestor and the deliberative democrat,” and in doing so, “[Young] does not distance herself from the constraints on political speech that are imposed by deliberative democrats.” In other words, protest as a form of political action is valuable in part because of the ways it goes beyond those constraints. Bar On concludes that Young misses “an opportunity to consider protest as a performance that projects not force . . . but rather political power.”\[31\]

3. THE CONDITIONS THAT MAKE TALK POSSIBLE

Given their shared opposition to the kind of constraints on speech I associated with “civility” above, it might seem strange to enlist Arendt and Bar On in the defense of any variation on the concept. But Arendt was just as aware of the fragility and vulnerability of the public square as she was of its political power and freedom. Her praise for the polis as the most “talkative of all bodies politic”\[30\] is tinged by her sense that it is a rare and fleeting human achievement—“this space does not always exist.”\[31\]

Even when such spaces flourished, access to the polis was limited at best, and the public spirit that animated this site of democratic engagement was historically replaced by “worldless” commitments of Christianity, and the momentous growth of both the private and the social realms in the modern era.\[27\] The value and the vulnerability of public spaces of discourse, in combination, offer reasons to shore them up in some way—indeed, Arendt described laws as just such metaphorical walls, protecting rather than participating in the space of politics.\[29\]

But the purest expression of both thinkers’ commitment to some sort of normative guidance or constraint when it comes to preserving a space for political discourse and cooperation—a space that is animated by both a shared common reality and a sense of public spiritedness—can be found in Bar On’s conclusion to “On the Opposition of Politics and War,” quoted at the beginning of this piece.

For the Greeks to fight justly against each other meant not destroying the conditions of the possibility of talking with each other and, therefore, preserving the most basic conditions of the possibility of politics and especially some version of democratic politics. . . . I think of politics agonally and democratically, and so have come to appreciate the Greek commitment to the preservation of the conditions that make talk possible.\[36\]

What are the conditions that make talk possible? Bar On’s comments conclude with a set of nuanced reflections on the place, if any, of violence in politics—and they are intended to allow for the possibility of violence that can be both justified and constrained on political grounds: i.e., insofar as it allows for and contributes to the possibility of future political discourse among enemies. But Bar On’s commitment to the preservation of such conditions, precisely because of the value of talk, can be seen in her wider corpus: for example, in discussions of political protest, national identity, debates within feminism, responsibility for evil, and terrorism. And her commitment is, at heart, deeply Arendtian. It is thus worth exploring what “civility”—understood in terms of the conditions that make ongoing political talk possible—might look like.

At first glance, this is a decidedly minimalist approach to civility. All that must be maintained, after all, is the possibility of talk; there is no requirement that the talk be refined, well-mannered, polite, or especially respectful. But this—of course—is too quick. As former combatants and peace practitioners have testified, one of the hardest steps toward reconciliation after conflict is creating spaces where people are willing even to speak to one another, let alone to connect, compromise, and resolve entrenched disputes. Conditions for talk include the willingness to recognize the other as an interlocutor—itself a gesture of respect across massive divides—and the willingness to trust in the authority of the process and all those involved: that you will be heard and listened to, that your testimony will be believed, and your claims and needs respected, that you will not be mocked, derided, exploited, or attacked. Considered in this context, Arendt’s remarks on the riskiness of speaking among others take on new meaning:

This courage is not necessarily or even primarily related to a willingness to suffer the consequences; courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one’s private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one’s self.\[17\]

If peace processes after conflict—admittedly an outlier among political contexts—help us identify the effort that goes into creating a space of meaningful speech, in Arendt’s sense, we can still recognize the need for faith in the space itself and in one’s fellow participants in how we maintain public spaces for speech in ordinary contexts. If everyone knows that anything goes, such faith will quickly disintegrate, along with any incentive to participate. This is the Arendtian case for constraint.

First and foremost, such constraints will not apply uniformly, simply because we have different relationships to public
spaces and the power dynamics within them. A moderator at a town hall, for example, may need to maintain decorum even as individual forum members must be free to express increasing passion and antagonism, for the event to proceed. Leaders and role models must recognize the extent to which their own restraint creates space for others to speak up and disclose, even as their conduct presents examples for others to follow. Such differences are not limited to formal roles, either; for people to participate in a public space, they must understand themselves as participants: namely, that they are included and recognized and heard. Given extended histories of exclusion and silencing, particular efforts must be made by some citizens to communicate this message to others—a redistribution of entitlement to speak freely, as it were. Some people may be given more leeway to speak freely, while others urged to restrain themselves; in both cases, this is for the integrity of the space itself.

On the surface, a variable understanding of individual obligations to be civil might resemble what is often called, colloquially, “punch up, kiss down.” This somewhat blunt approach that argues the degree of civility someone is owed is inversely proportionate to their relative power in the scenario. The more powerful must remain polite while the less powerful can let loose. “Punch up, kiss down” is intended to counteract both the tendency of civility to reward those with power and the human tendency to “kiss up” to those with more power, and “punch down” those with less, for reasons of both self-interest and status anxiety. There are many issues with an unannounced “punch up, kiss down” approach, including but not limited to the complexity of establishing the precise relative power differentials between people in any context, not to mention the questionable practice of reducing individuals to their bare social location (something to which Arendt herself would strongly object). But these need not concern us here, because tying obligations of civility to the preservation of talk avoids the pitfalls of reducing the obligations of civility to reductive identity politics—and instead invites us to consider the risks and responsibilities of speaking in public with others.

Arendt was clear that all political speech and action takes courage, both to enter the public sphere and to make oneself visible to different (plural) others, within it. But while we each take risks when entering the public sphere and engaging in political action, not all exposures are created equal. Consider, for example, the extent to which members of marginalized groups (racialized minorities, disabled people, women—especially women of color, trans women, other gender minorities, etc.) are far more likely to face hate, harassment, and threats of violence, both off and especially online.38

Canadian politician Jagmeet Singh—the first nonwhite leader of a major Canadian political party—articulates exactly this worry, when asked about a crowd of belligerent protestors chasing him and yelling vitriolic profanities:39

I am worried about what that means for politics generally. What that means for people who want to participate and see something like that and then maybe think, ‘It’s not a place for me.’ And how we might miss some incredible people who won’t come forward and participate in politics. I’ve experienced a lot of this kind of hatred and being physically attacked when I was younger and I learned to defend myself. I’ve taken martial arts. But that shouldn’t be the requirement to be a politician or a leader. That’s what I’m worried about.40

Singh, who has previously maintained his composure while being attacked for being a Muslim extremist (he is Sikh), told to cut off his turban to look “Canadian,” and been followed by a man threatening a “citizen’s arrest” against him, rightly identifies the higher barriers to public participation facing some citizens and not others. In the cases he discusses, it is rudeness and not civility that is likely to have a chilling effect on political participation.

Arendt is clear that while each of us risks something when we enter the political sphere—and that what we risk is often beyond our control—we are nevertheless required to take responsibility for our speech and actions, as part of our commitment to our shared common space. An Arendtian notion of responsibility is both individual (I must take responsibility for the consequences—even unexpected knock-on effects—of my actions) and also a commitment to be part of the political collective, the polis, to care for and nurture the relational space in which political speech and action are possible. Indeed, I propose that Arendtian civility is just this: the willingness to take responsibility, through reflection and restraint, on the extent to which our speech and actions either contribute to the health of our polis—that is, the space of speech and reasons to which those in our political community have equal access—or undermine and threaten it, either by limiting the access of others or by damaging its character as a shared space of speech and persuasion. Speech that silences others41 or that refuses to be accountable to them as fellow participants in shared political endeavor fails to meet this standard. Those of us with less at risk and more responsibility find ourselves with more opportunity to reflect on how and where our contributions are meaningful on their own terms and as a contribution to the space itself.

In this way, Arendtian civility is not dissimilar to Elizabeth Anderson’s notion of democratic equality, which she employs to argue that egalitarians should be focused on determining the resources and capacities necessary to ensure equal access to political participation, rather than countering all the vagaries of fortune.42 Arendtian civility acknowledges the role played by power relations in political discourse without reducing our obligations to them. And, unlike “punch up, kiss down,” it also asks something of even the most marginalized and oppressed, in the challenge that they “risk” themselves by entering the public, political sphere. At the very least, all participants must be open to the possibility of meaningful negotiation with (former and current) oppressors, as well as willing to make themselves minimally legible to very different others. But this approach to civility demands more than simply following a set of rules: it requires that we attend to the risks that others have taken as well as our own, and...
that we remain aware of their variable impact on both the conversation and the conversationalists (as Singh does, when redirecting his audience’s attention to potential political actors who are disincentivized to speak). This approach to civility is a matter of attunement and response.

Focusing on what is needed to preserve the conditions for meaningful discourse allows us to offer a different answer than Calhoun does to Bell’s worry about Frederick Douglass in conversation with apologists for chattel slavery; meaningful debate is already impossible when your very humanity is disregarded, as Douglass’s was by defenders of slavery, whether or not his society had reached consensus on this point. Douglass had no obligation to tolerate the intolerable when what was intolerable was the denial of his own political standing and humanity. Douglass simply did not share a space of meaningful contestation and debate—a polis—with his erstwhile opponents, and so concern for conditions needed to preserve that space became irrelevant. Indeed, his situation—on the brink of war—was one that Arendt describes when she says,

> When people are only for or against other people, speech becomes “mere talk,” simply one more means toward the end, whether it serves to deceive the enemy or to dazzle everybody with propaganda; here words reveal nothing . . . .

In other words, an Arendtian approach to civility may require acknowledging that some formerly political spaces have been damaged beyond repair, or at least beyond what repair talk itself can offer. Bar On addresses this point when she remarks,

> where there are unforgivable acts . . . [we] lack . . . any given straightforward ways to repair the rupture. If what has been breached can be rebuilt at all, what seems to be required is an innovative political action that somehow reinstates people as equal political actors capable of freedom, as well as of promise and forgiveness, and hence of the reconstruction of a lightly and cautiously held together space of politics.

I appreciate both the distinction between meaningful speech and “mere talk” and the recognition that in some circumstances, politics and political spaces have degraded to the point where preservation is—in at least some sense—a lost cause. A commitment to speech does not require that someone argue pointlessly with those who refuse their humanity or deny their dignity; there is a point where that is no longer meaningful, and it becomes “mere talk.” In those moments we require some other “innovative political action”—a rupture, break, protest, or severing—that reshapes or remakes the political space, elsewhere.

### 4. ACCOUNTABILITY, REPAIR, AND “MERE TALK”

I have argued that this understanding of civility—as a commitment to preserving the conditions of talking with one another—holds more political promise than understanding it either in terms of a social duty to remain polite and tolerate the intolerable, or as an invitation to “punch up” or “kiss down,” depending on one’s social location. That does not mean it is immune to abuse or exploitation, of course—but here, too, both Arendt and Bar On are a source of guidance. At the end of her chapter on political action, Arendt remarks that there are only two moral precepts not applied to politics from the outside, but which properly belong to political normativity: the “readiness to forgive and be forgiven, to make promises and to keep them.”

There is much to be said about Arendt’s conceptions of both promising and forgiveness—but for present purposes, promising is best understood as our capacity to both hold ourselves accountable and to be accountable to others, while forgiveness describes our capacity to work toward repair. Arendt turns to these faculties because “they arise . . . directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms” for the boundless, chaotic nature of political action and speech. Indeed, she is also making a claim about the political status of both: namely, that active democratic politics is how we make ourselves accountable to one another, and the freedom enacted through collective political enaction is our best hope for repair. Given the close relationship of promising and forgiving to the political, as Arendt understands it, they are useful tests for seeing whether the constraints imposed on political speech are appropriate to the domain. In other words, when civility is wielded as a tool of gatekeeping and oppression, it fails to have mechanisms for mutual accountability and repair.

The role of these mechanisms can be illustrated by considering a very ordinary, everyday instance of oppressive civility: practices of tone-policing. Indeed, tone-policing often pops up as an example of why the demands of civility can be oppressive. The tone policer shifts the focus from the content of the conversation to the tone, language, or manner of discussion and then announces that the shift cannot be reversed until tone is addressed. In other words, to tone-police is to assert one’s authority over the conversation: what is appropriate to it, how that can or ought to be conveyed, and the extent to which the other’s expression (e.g., language, tone, or emotion) meets or fails to meet both. The demand made by a tone policer is not a request (or, if it is, it is a highly imperious one); in that way, the tone policer refuses to be accountable to their interlocutor, instead holding themselves as the self-standing authority.

Similarly, we can see the role for repair when we contrast tone-policing with other forms of tone-intervention. Certainly, there are times when it is reasonable and just to ask for kindness or patience—“I’m so sorry, but I have a really difficult history with this, can you go a little slower, or skip over that part”—or even to request the speaker’s trust, good faith, and charitable interpretation while we stumble towards meaning, making mistakes along the way. What distinguishes such requests for a different register from tone-policing is not just that they leave open the possibility of negotiation, compromise, even consensus—i.e., accountability to the other—but that the request is aimed at the possibility of repair, of working toward relational resolution, rather than holding fast to the authority of one’s own subjectivity.
Of course, political talk is not always conciliatory and kind—or far from it. In fact, as Bar On reminds us, the work of political repair is often achieved by demands for accountability, and even protest.

Protest, though, more than other kinds of political action, both displays political power and has the potential of reminding people of their ability to act collectively and shape and reshape their collective life . . . that they can come together with others and be political agents of change. In this way protest may be reminding people of their capacity for political freedom. 64

Civility is often seen as a limit to protest: a set of predetermined standards that establish how to protest, when to protest, and—crucially—what is ruled out from the outset. Similarly, it is often invoked as a reason not to protest or object (“now is the time for civility and respect”), as it was on social media following the recent death of Queen Elizabeth, when billionaire Jeff Bezos joined a racist, misogynistic mob attacking Dr. Uju Anya, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Carnegie Mellon. 65 It is hard not to see this as civility at its worst, a kind of tone-policing writ large: speak your truth, but not in any way that makes us uncomfortable or puts us out. Civility was weaponized without accountability, and without concern for possible repair to silence colonial and genocidal histories tied to the Queen’s reign. Assessing protest as a commitment to the preservation of the conditions that make possible meaningful political speech and action, on the other hand, provides very different guidance. It invites us to see protest as a way of being accountable to one another, aimed at a collective, reparative reshaping. Civility understood along these lines would not only invite but insist that the death of a monarch—and with her, the end of a global political era—must be an opportunity to tell multiple, overlapping histories of her contested political significance.

Many critics of civility may be willing to accept the focus I have placed on the conditions for meaningful political speech, the importance of distinguishing such speech from “mere talk,” and even the importance of accountability and repair, as mechanisms for measuring if we do what we intend, when we aim for the health of political spaces. The sticking point, however, may well be the language of “civility”—bound up, as it is, in histories of racism, colonialism, and exclusion, and etymologically connected to problematic notions of “civilizing” the other. I can’t help but imagine that the two figures I have invoked here might offer a shrug in response. Both were undoubtedly pragmatic and flexible, just as the approach I have proposed is intended to be. What makes speech possible in one context may not in another; in some instances, preserving appropriate conditions may be straightforward, in others messy. And of course, the conditions for speech are more than speech—they are also material and practical. Sometimes what makes talk possible is a microphone, a stage, an audience, an income. This, again, was an insight very much in character for both Bar On and Arendt. There is an anecdote shared by Arendt’s student and biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, that cannot help but remind me of Ami.

A group of her New School students came to her before one of the big anti-war demonstrations in New York and asked her advice: they had been approached by a labor union group over the possibility of co-sponsoring a demonstration, but they didn’t know whether to accept this proposal because the union group shared some of their goals but not others, and they feared being “co-opted.” Hannah Arendt pondered the problem, and then replied: “Ach, ya, but you could use their mimeograph machine!” She figured that as long as the students could keep producing statements and manifestos that let people know what they thought, what their goals were, all would be well. The more discussion, the more action, the more power. 66

What Arendt and Bar On grasped is this: sometimes fragile political spaces require more and freer speech. Sometimes they require constraints on speech for the sake of speech. And sometimes what they really need is a mimeograph machine.

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NOTES

13. Philosopher Amy Oberding also rejects a sharp distinction between the public and private, when it comes to discussions of civility, etiquette, and manners (“Subclinical Bias, Manners, and Moral Harm,” 4). In doing so, she draws on the Confucian tradition of understanding all three in terms of li.
14. Ronnie Gura Sadovsky’s work on political etiquette is a notable and important exception to this rule. Rather than conceiving of political etiquette solely in terms of constraints on speech, she acknowledges the development of “a peculiar form of etiquette” with distinctive norms that express respect for social groups (“Political Etiquette”).


23. MacLachlan, *Tone Policing and the Assertion of Authority.*


25. Arendt: “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.” Moreover, “most political action, in so far as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally . . . finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action” (*The Human Condition,* 26).

26. Bar On: “Political freedom is renewed through popular political action, and does not exist without it” (*Normativity, Feminism, and Politics,* 14). Arendt: “The realm of the polis, on the contrary, was the sphere of freedom” (*The Human Condition,* 30).

27. Bar On: “As a result of present atrocities, there is a continued need for the kind of historical and local human-size explanations of human evil deeds and if, like Arendt, one is concerned with accountability, explanations that do not elide the possibility of holding evil doers accountable for their deeds” (*Standing Between Us and Our Grave Wrongdoings,* 114).


34. There is not space to fully articulate Arendt’s political ontology here, but she refers to a loss of commitment to the idea of the commons as a place for speaking and acting with one another, and the rise of—among other phenomena—government bureaucracies, corporations, and other institutions modeled more on household management than negotiation among engaged political equals.


39. Jagmeet Singh was elected Leader of the Canadian New Democratic Party in 2017, the first racialized person to lead a Canadian federal political party on a permanent basis.


41. Emerick, “The Violence of Silencing.”

42. Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?”


47. While examples of tone policing abound, academic discussions typically point to Audre Lorde’s example from *The Uses of Anger:* “I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says, ’Tell me how you feel but don’t say it too harshly or I cannot hear you.’ But is it if my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change?” (*The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,* 125). But there are more pedestrian examples: “adjust your tone” or “I’m not going to listen to you while you’re shouting!” or “if you want my attention, then you’ll speak to me with the respect I deserve.” For further analysis, see MacLachlan, *Tone Policing and the Assertion of Authority.*


49. Lawrence, “Uju Anya on the Queen, Jeff Bezos, and the Family History Behind Her Tweet.”

50. Young-Bruehl, “Reading Arendt in Caracas.”

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Appreciating Being Seen: Attunement and Recognition

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I was recently in a conversation with a friend who lost a loved one. She said that one of the things that inspired her to carry on was the idea of trying to take up or embody some quality of her beloved that she particularly admired. There were many things I admired about Ami, but one of the things I most admired was Ami’s acute attunement to others.

I met Ami at the Socialist Feminist Philosophers in Action (SOFPHIA) group about thirty years ago. Though I didn’t see her often, when we did end up in the same place, it felt like not much time had gone by. After we parted company is that I really felt seen by her—genuinely seen.

I have been thinking about misrecognition and the role it plays in many of the horrors that Ami wrote about, as well as the ongoing struggle for recognition both in our political work moving toward justice and in our everyday experiences within the profession of philosophy, where I suspect most of us, at least some of the time, feel profoundly unseen.

Let me briefly say a bit about the political importance of recognition and the harms of misrecognition and then turn to some more very brief comments about the thrilling experience of being genuinely seen.

In recent work on epistemic injustice, particularly testimonial injustice, the topic of misrecognition has received considerable attention. As José Medina argues in his recent paper on the topic, there are two types of misrecognition—one is what he calls a “quantitative recognition deficit” and it comes in two varieties—one in which a topic is not being taken up (he uses the example of racial violence, but gender violence is another example here as well) and the other is when a person attempting to articulate concerns about a topic aren’t listened to, heard, or seen. These quantitative “pathologies” are usually the subject of analyses of epistemic injustice and often the solution involves calls for more inclusive and deeper discussions to make what isn’t recognized more socially visible.

But consider nonbinary or trans people and the systematic misrecognition that they experience. These go beyond quantitative recognition deficits. As Robin Dembroff writes, “nonbinary identities often are not only ignored, but unintelligible. Once again, this system of misrecognition is generated by the structures and practices that construct and define dominant gender kinds. . . . within most dominant contexts, nonbinary gender kinds simply do not appear” (35). Though nonbinary identities are increasingly recognized within queer communities, they are often not seen in dominant contexts, much as a generation ago, same-sex relationships were misrecognized in this way. This sort of misrecognition or erasure extends beyond testimonial silencing, and often directly contributes to violence—police violence, mass incarceration, intimate partner violence, and suicide.

Citing Medina again, Dembroff says, “When a phenomenon like racial violence becomes systematically distorted, it is naïve to expect that the distortions will automatically disappear when more attention is given to the topic or when more credibility is given to the victims or groups affected” (5). In other words, there is a deeper dysfunction, a more complex form of misrecognition that is operating, and increased social visibility is not necessarily going to remedy the injustice.

This deeper dysfunction can be located not in “epistemic injustice” and the violence that can spring from it, but rather in a perhaps more fundamental failure of recognition that distorts or eliminates the subject, such that their “moral injuries” can’t be seen, can’t get uptake. In failing to have a means for uptake of these moral injuries, one’s sense of self and capacity to form meaningful relationships, both personal and political, can be undermined. Forms of invisibility, humiliation, and erasure can preclude the possibility of meaningful political agency. As Axel Honneth, and in a different register, Robin Dillon, have argued, the lack of self-respect that springs from misrecognition can
distort a person’s ability to act and, I would suggest, even their ability to be motivated to act.

Judith Butler’s work in *Frames of War* and elsewhere suggests that this type of misrecognition obliterates subjects such that they cannot be mourned because they must remain nameless. It’s akin to what Calvin Warren describes as “ontological violence”—he writes:

> the “state of injury” [produced by anti-blackness] runs much deeper than physical abuse, torture, and violation. It is an ontological violence. This form of violence situates blacks outside the traditional terms of humanism and into the realm we might describe as the “ontological state of exception.” Neither bio-politics nor necropolitics cover this black being in the exception because both discourses presume a “human-being” upon which politics exercises power. Indeed, we might suggest that blacks are placed in a netherworld of conceptual chaos that marks the limits of politics...” (108).

Or consider this comment from one of the incarcerated students I have worked with, James Davis III:

> The imposition of the prisoner identity is effectuated through different means. He is physically separated from “the world” and everything that it entails; he is forced into a new, cold world of brick, concrete and steel surrounded by the quiet violence of razor-wire fencing the very existence of which highlights his dangerousness and proclaims that he deserves his captivity.

> ... His identity is socially stigmatized, but as a black man he is conscious of the stigma of being a prisoner before ever becoming one... Once in prison the prisoner must contend with the conceptions that are intended to define him as other than who he is.

These forms of misrecognition devastate. But there may be contexts in which to combat this sort of misrecognition. I tend to lean toward pessimism, so I’m not the best person to think about what might counter such misrecognition. Perhaps we can see it in protest slogans, like, “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it” and “Hands up! Don’t shoot!”—these are statements that target conditions of recognition themselves. Some classrooms might be such places—I think my prison classrooms are sometimes sites that combat dysfunctional misrecognition.

In concluding, let me come back to Ami’s profound capacity to genuinely see and recognize us, her friends, her new acquaintances, students, and, it turns out, newly pregnant people.

Her marvelous perceptual attunement is certainly a virtue, but I think this capacity, this ability to make those she is talking to really feel seen and heard, to cut through noise and get to the core of what we want to argue or what we are saying, is an ethico-political accomplishment. She did this without, it seemed to me, putting my views through her views. Without needing to translate my words and thoughts through the theories that she found most compelling. There was a real sense in which I felt both who I am and what I value was held up, elevated, supported. It was more than kindness, more than compassion; it provided me with a feeling of fullness and deep satisfaction. That’s not to say she always agreed with what I said—that isn’t what recognition requires—but I felt understood. It’s a capacity that I treasure and will endeavor to both theorize about and attempt to enact in an effort to do what my other friend suggested, to try to embody that which I so admired in Ami, so that she can stay with me, particularly when I feel unseen.

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Hannah Arendt and Bat-Ami Bar On on Violence Against Women

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

President Biden returned focus to the ongoing problem of violence against women by signing the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in March 2022. The law, originally enacted in 1994 (expired in 2019) provides direct omnibus spending towards victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The “bipartisan” reauthorization demonstrates not only the urgency of the problem, but also its priority in the country, and should set an example for other countries to follow. As such, the law not only provides recognition of the issue but also active support to “survivors, the thousands of local programs that serve them, and communities with much-needed resources for housing, legal assistance, alternative to criminal responses, and prevention programming.”

Recalling the 1991 event that predated the VAWA, that is, Anita Hill’s testimony against the then-Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas, it is important to note that many harmful acts against women at the time were not recognized to be such but were the norm of a society that operated on patriarchal values. In 2021, thirty years after...
her testimony regarding Thomas’s sexual misconduct, Hill says the following:

And if I could just clearly say what it was that happened, I assumed that would be enough. I knew that there would be doubters. But for me, I knew that all I could do was to say and make very clear what my experience had been. I knew it was important to the question of capability as a Supreme Court justice. But I wanted them to see it, and that was something that they had to come to a conclusion about. I mean, they had to interpret it. That was their job. My job was to tell it. And I did my job. I don’t think they did theirs.6

Two things are salient in Hill’s statement: first, her epistemical and moral assumption that it would be “sufficient” to state what happened clearly, and second, the role of the Supreme Court and Supreme Court Justices in US democracy. To be sure, as a law professor and author, Hill’s concern for the health of the judicial system is tantamount to her work as an advocate of equality and social justice in a democratic society.7 In this paper, however, I want to focus on the first point from a feminist philosophical perspective by taking up Bat-Ami Bar On’s and Hannah Arendt’s insights on violence and the role that our need to understand plays in the creation of political discourse in the aftermath of violence.

Let me begin with some numbers. According to estimates published by the World Health Organization, “globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.”4 In the US, 1,946 women were murdered by men in 2018.8 In Turkey, 307 women were murdered in 2021.6 UN Women’s research shows that “violence against women disproportionately affects low- and lower-middle-income countries and regions.”7 Yet violence against women cannot simply be reduced to socioeconomic factors that may otherwise be related to one’s individual and social well-being. The possibility of being subjected to gender-based violence is not determined solely by one’s socioeconomic or educational background; neither is the potential of becoming a violent agent. Highly educated and well-off people also commit violence against women. If the social and economic status of perpetrators and victims do not determine the outcome of gender violence, this question cannot be sufficiently addressed merely by changing socioeconomic arrangements. That is, the question of gender-based violence cannot with certainty be remedied by making people richer or more educated.

While there is something inherently destructive in perpetrating violence (the question of a justification set aside), the aftermath of violence holds a creative potential for political discourse stemming from such violence. Perhaps this can be a way to have an honest reckoning with violence despite the countless court cases—for instance, involving quite “certain” or “indubitable” rape incidents—where the victim’s ability to be “heard” and the “speakability” of the violent acts is still raised controversy. This tension arises from the dimension of “unspeakability” of the trauma caused by violence and the accompanying need to “speak” of the experience. This tension becomes apparent in how the victim/survivor’s testimony is received.

While the number of reports of violence against women have increased since Anita Hill’s testimony, there is still a need to understand and to articulate gender-based violence as political and take it up politically. The following then, will not merely offer a rehearsal of Bar On’s and Arendt’s political philosophical projects, but rather an attempt to understand, to face up to, the everyday violence that women suffer in the world today, and to make such attempt become the basis of a political discussion that we desperately need.

PART 1: THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND

In the 1950 Preface published in the first edition of The Origins of Totalitarianism, which Arendt wrote in the aftermath of the Holocaust, she identified the unprecedented phenomenon of totalitarianism and made clear her commitment to “think” and “the need to understand,” thus:

The conviction that everything that happens on earth must be comprehensible to man can lead to interpreting history by commonplaces. Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. . . . Comprehension, in short, means the unmeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of reality—whatever it may be.8

In elucidating comprehension to be a courageous, unmeditated action that does not diminish the “impact of reality and the shock of experience,” Arendt makes clear that it is not her aim to cover over the horror of what is lived but to show that judgment takes place regardless of what is suffered. While Origins is not autobiographical, Arendt herself—a German-Jewish woman, who has escaped the “final solution” by emigrating from Germany first to France, and then eventually to the United States—is one of the “subjects” of totalitarian violence. Her theses regarding the historical and phenomenological roots of totalitarianism weave together themes of privilege, racism (including antisemitism), and loneliness to articulate one of the pernicious outcomes of imperialism that led to totalitarianism: superfluousness. Becoming superfluous, in her analysis, was the fate not only of Central European Jews, homosexuals, and Roma people targeted by Hitler, but also of African peoples who were exploited and massacred by white colonists. Becoming superfluous made the victims powerless and not able to seize power against the destructive forces of the Third Reich and other imperialist powers. Simply put, superfluousness entailed the elimination (destruction) of political agency.

In the late 1960s, still writing against the background of the “wars and revolutions” of the twentieth century and in response to the student uprisings against the Vietnam War that she aptly articulates as a “global phenomenon,” Arendt
offers a more nuanced reflection on the phenomenon of violence as separate from totalitarianism to differentiate it from “power proper” that can emerge in collective action of people in the political arena. Violence here is not merely the wielding of destructive forces against dissenters to keep unity of the “people,” but the way in which liberatory action may or may not entail politics.

Sixty years after the Origins, Bar On takes up what she dubs “Arendtian exercises in understanding” in The Subject of Violence published in 2002. Bar On’s turn to Arendt is significant, in her words:

I tend to trust Arendt’s work perhaps because I cannot but read most of it in any other way than as a kind of writing that is fully infused with the personal. . . . I engage in this personalizing kind of reading though Arendt, who does narrate some biographical stories, was an extremely private person, and never undertook the writing of a detailed public autobiographical tale.6

The exercises Bar On offers are Arendtian in two ways: (1) they take up insights on Arendt’s own experiences of violence from the receiving end of such traumatizing experience—denoting “the ethico-political crisis” in the aftermath the “Nazi Judeocide;” and (2) they emphasize how Arendt rendered “speakable” what happened to ultimately understand and reconcile with reality.10

By taking up the complex dimensions of “speakability” and “unspeakability” of violence/horror that Bar On underscores, I want to show the political potential not only in the resistance to violence, but also in the speaking up about violence to allow for re-envisioning the political agency of the victim/survivor and perhaps more optimistically, to affect change in the structures that allow for such violence. As Bar On notes,

Because one is not alone in the world and others, just like oneself, are the originators of action that is ‘always the beginning of something new’ that unpredictably changes things about one’s world (Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 390) one has to always renew one’s bid for understanding the world.11

She further contends, “there is a lot she [Arendt] has to offer to feminist attempts at understanding.”12 Weaving together Arendt’s conception of “superfluousness” and Bar On’s understanding of “everyday violence” that women experience, I want to suggest that violence against women renders women—as a social group—superfluous and attempts to strip them of their agency.

PART 2: VIOLENCE AS STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

VIOLANCE: THE PHENOMENON

The question of violence—both its nature, and its uses and justifications—remains a concern for theorists and practitioners alike.13 Whether it be within the international or domestic arena, the analyses remain wide ranging and complex.

In this paper, I will take up Bar On’s and Arendt’s conceptions of violence in their work to in turn outline a framework from which to articulate the potential political agency that can be created from the stories of such violence. This potential political agency adumbrates how the violent experiences that initially render a victim/survivor speechless can also help them become political agents. This is a potential inherent in the aftermath of violence where the victim/survivor can—in offering their narrative—exercise such agency. To motivate this account of potential political agency I build on Bar On’s use of Arendtian insights on violence and its “speakability” and “unspeakability” to address gender-based violence, which remains underdeveloped in Arendtian scholarship.14 While gender-based violence is a structural injustice, the perpetrator is still a human agent attacking another due to the social identities they hold. Thus, we require an account of violence that addresses this interpersonal harm.

In the following, I will endorse a conception of violence understood as a transgression (physical or institutional) that injures another, where such violence is in most cases enacted with the intention to impose harm. This account of violence is adapted from Newton Garver’s conception of violence as “violation of persons.”15 On Garver’s view, violation of persons can happen at three different registers: (1) violation of one’s body, (2) violation of one’s dignity, (3) violation of one’s autonomy.16 While this concept may extend to other harms or wrongs that overlap with or are wider than gender-based violence (for instance, race-based violence), my aim is to emphasize the significance of the conditions that surpass an individualistic account of the phenomenon:

1. An action A by subject S can be said to be a violation of personhood,
   (a) if it is done intentionally to subject P against subject P’s consent, and
   (b) it causes harm to one’s sense of self.17

2. A structure C can be said to be violent if it allows for such violence against members of a group M by members of another group K.

Statement 1 captures the violation of one’s freedom, going against Kantian noninterference or nondomination that is central to autonomy, as well as the violation of the Millian premise of imposing legitimate limitations on one’s liberty, when one’s action can cause harm to another, namely, the harm principle.18 Together, domination or power over someone can become violent when it does not respect a person’s humanity and imposes intentional harm onto the person, overriding one’s ability to exercise the right to make decisions about one’s life or destroying one’s basic interests.

Statement 2 shifts the focus from the agent of violence to the social structure that allows for the emergence of violence: this, in Iris Marion Young’s terms, makes up a structural injustice.19 While according to Young, “violence” is a type of oppression, mainly emphasized through the physical harms done unto members of a particular social group—
for instance, women—such violence is also identified by the social structures and the context in which violence is perpetrated.20 Violence, then, not only overrides the decision-making capacity of its victim, but can also render the exercise of agency difficult in the immediate aftermath of the violent act—the trauma colors one’s everyday life and actions.21

While violence against women can be the result of both 1 (a) and (b), I contend that it also partakes in what condition 2 describes, and that is why the violence against women (especially femicide—the intentional killing of women because they are women) is understood to be “political” in its intimate relationship with the social and legal structures of society.

THE UNSPEAKABILITY OF VIOLENCE

The conditions of violence elucidated above take into account its potential causes and effects as Bar On suggests in her 1998 piece, “Everyday Violence and Ethico-Political Crisis.” Here, she argues that violence not only can reveal the “devaluation of humanity and dignity” of others but can also “generate [it], in people.”22 This devaluation is the manifestation of an “ethico-political impoverishment” which itself is demonstrated in “everyday violence” that is “common rather than rare.”23 Everyday violence can be encountered in private and in public:

It is the violence that is intertwined with, and therefore configures, people’s everyday lives of public or private work, sustenance recreation, and intimate relations. In the case of a large number of women, rape and battering are everyday violence. For Turks in today’s Germany, everyday violence is the function of skinheads’ neo-Nazi attacks. In Rwanda and Afghanistan, everyday violence is post-colonially spawned by the conflict of current warlords.24

In juxtaposing the examples of violent acts (such as rape and battering) with the fear of such threats and the lack of individual safety, her analysis takes up not only instantiations of violence but also the conditions that allow for it.25 Later, in 2002, she underscores the “lived experience” of violence, that is, the connection between the experience and its “speakability” and “unspeakability.” In her words, “[T]here is something about violence or some of it that is inarticulable in language.” And she continues thus:

When I describe my own encounters with violence or other violent events in what seems to me as all the small and striking details that I can pull together, I, nonetheless, feel that there is a residue that exceeds the words that I use and, therefore, is unnamed and, though perhaps expressible in other ways, like painting or sculpting, in some considerable manner, conceptually unknown.”26

Bar On’s evocation of the element of unspeakability of violence entails two things: first, what is “conceptually unknown” in her terms depicts both the subjective experience that cannot be rendered intelligible in words when the perpetrator renders one “speechless,” and second, the inability to make sense (understand) the reasons for becoming a victim/survivor of violence that results from a structural injustice. The unprovoked violent attack arising from social contexts which allow for its enactment can make it difficult for the victim/survivor to be heard and understood. For such understanding to be possible, the victim/survivor needs to be able to make sense of what happened herself. The requirement, in many instances, for giving reasons for provocation from the victim in this case becomes quite counter-productive if not altogether inappropriate: Was the woman attacked because she happens to be a woman in such a society? Or was she attacked because she supposedly wasn’t careful? The victim/survivor who is trying to understand why they were subjected to such violence often cannot be properly heard and understood if the burden of providing reasons is put on them. As a result, when the victim/survivor is required to provide some proof of reason or provocation for the attack, the harm is likely to remain unremedied and the victim not understood.

VIOLENCE AND POWER

Next, to unpack violence as a structural injustice, I turn to the distinction that Arendt draws between violence and power. In Arendtian political phenomenology, power is a potential that is actualized in collective action—which is judged by its principles—while violence is like force or sheer strength ready to be used that operates on the principle of instrumentality.27 Most of the time, violence uses weapons whose primary aim is destruction. Moreover, violence is itself a “means”—is used—for further ends, until it becomes an end in itself. While violence itself is a means, it also uses other means for its purposes—among such means we can count one’s own bodily force and strength coupled with skills in battery, as well as other weapons of destruction. To be sure, violence exercised in self-defense aims at the prevention of such destruction. While power emerges in the creation of political space that rests on the conditions of plurality and equality, violence can be utilized in private or in public. The distinction between the origins of power and violence motivates her argument that politics can only exist in action and can be sustained through human speech (and understanding).

By her account, power is the essence, that is, the “for the sake of which” government exists, and not violence.28 The ability to command obedience is not the reason of being of the government (à la Hobbes). Her conviction rests on the differentiation between “collective power” and “power over” or “domination” that requires “command and obedience.”29 While a collective can have power to act together, a state can have power over its population, for instance, by the order of instrumentality. As such, a state wields its power in order to require submission and obedience by sanctioning violence or punishment in the case of disobedience. The state can punish or prohibit by sanctioning violence against disobedience. On its own, Arendt contends, violence cannot become the reason for political togetherness.30
Central to violence in Arendt’s account is instrumentality, yet such instrumentality is present at four different levels of violence:

1. **Individual**: Violence as the taking of the law into one’s hands.¹⁵

This is the violence inherent in what we may call “frontier justice” or “justice prior to law” in a Hobbesian sense which is not justice proper. While Arendt concedes that “under certain circumstances violence—acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences—is the only way to set the scales of justice right again,”¹⁶ such acts are in “conflict with the constitutions of civilized communities.” In “Everyday Violence,” Bar On shows the intricate connection between the desire for such violence that stems from pain, for instance, of an Israeli wife’s “immediate pain from the loss of her murdered husband” and of a Palestinian woman’s “pain of a present life under Jewish-Israeli occupation and from the pain of their people and their past.” Their “will for revenge” demonstrates the desire for “individual violence”—the taking of law into their hands.

2. **Social**: Violence as the perpetration of force or harm against the members of a social group stemming from oppression.

Following Young’s argument, “what makes violence a phenomenon of social injustice, and not merely an individual moral wrong, is its systemic character, its existence as a social practice.” This is one reason why violence against women (qua women) does not remain at the individual level; due to its systemic character the possibility of such violence can incite fear of such violence in any woman.

3. **Political**: Violence as the means to achieve political ends.

This is the type of violence that is endorsed to achieve political goals, for instance, liberation. Following Arendt, Bar On argues that such violence needs “ethico-political” justification “that is at once sensitive to the ethical issues raised by violence’s effects on particular individuals and attuned to the issues that violent action raises insofar as it enters a political space or is mixed with political action.” This type of violence can take place during revolutionary liberation where a collective utilizes violence to seize power from their oppressor.

4. **Genocidal**: Totalitarian violence, or otherwise terror—inflicting violence for the sake of violence.

This is the violence that manifests the ultimate dehumanization of racial and ethnic groups of people that are targeted because of their social identities. Arendt criticizes this type of violence in the *Origins* when she takes up the superfluousness created by totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

For Arendt, violence is an activity that operates on the means-ends categories, which is to say, a violent act has an end (usually external to itself unless it turns into terror) that is in need of means to achieve such end. It follows, then, for Arendt:

(a) Violence is inherently destructive (in the name of being productive).²⁷

(b) Violence is inherently “instrumental” (instead of being an "end in itself");²⁸

(c) Violence is anti- or pre-political, yet it usually appears alongside its counterpart “power.”²⁹

In the light of these characteristics, Arendt's distinction between violence and power elucidated above can account for the “individual,” “social,” and “genocidal” levels of violence. However, her commitment to characteristic (c) makes her account fall short of “political” violence that is not liberatory in the proper sense. So violence can be justified when it is generative of possibilities of politics, while the violence that is destructive of politics becomes depoliticized on this account while not always able to rise to the level of genocidal violence. What does this mean? The violation of the potential political agency of women must be acknowledged as political in the sense that such oppression discards women's voices from politics. Such exclusion contributes to the mistaken view that violence against women is a merely personal transgression that befalls them.

Given the above characteristics, violence cannot generate “political freedom” even though it “appears” alongside “power.” Since Arendt draws a phenomenological rather than conceptual distinction between violence and power, she can concede that “nothing is more common than the combination of violence and power” without committing to the political status of the emergence of such violence and its aftermath. Yet, her account of political action as the accompaniment of speech and deed can give us a venue to think about the speechless horror that gender-based violence creates the potential of “speech”—echoing Susan Brison’s words in the *Aftermath*, “the communicative act of bearing witness to traumatic events not only transforms traumatic memories into narratives that can then be integrated into the survivor’s sense of self and view of the world, but it also reintegrates the survivor into a community, re-establishing bonds of trust and faith in others.”³⁰

Because power “corresponds to the human ability to not just act but to act in concert;”³¹ it is also what allows for “instrumental” thinking.³² So violence, while it is not “political action” proper, still happens within the domain of action. The power that can emerge out of a collective can utilize violence to manifest the collective’s freedom. The contradiction that is inherent in gender-based violence is that violence perpetrated against women does not reveal the violent agents’ freedom but rather domination.

Admittedly, Arendt’s view is limited to analyzing the role of violence as a structural injustice in social and political life. Simply put, the pre-political status Arendt gives to violence can depoliticize not only coercion and punishment but also the threat of violence. If the threat of violence cannot be
articulated as part of the political structure in which women find themselves identified as women, then these structures cannot be effectively modified to acknowledge women’s equal agency in their ability to take hold of their lives. Therefore, we require an account of violence to demonstrate its structural dimension. Our political discourse needs to address this structural dimension of violence that allows for “everyday violence,” while at the same time policies should be legislated to prevent the victimization of individuals.

PART 3: RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLITICS

ARENDTIAN PARADIGM OF POLITICS

Following Bar On’s and Young’s accounts, I have tried to show that violence against women is “political” in that is has something to do with political structures in which women find themselves regardless of their socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Does this mean, then, the problem of such violence is addressed politically? The response to this question is complicated.

Unfortunately, while acts of violence against women can be taken up in juridical (that is civil, and legal) settings, as in the case of Anita Hill and countless others, the conversation around such harm does little to address the structural problems implicit in such violence. At times, this is due to a lack of legal statutes in place to punish and prevent perpetrators. For example, this lack is especially prevalent in the literature after the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention that specified serious punishments for violence-related crimes against women. At others, it may point to a ubiquity of oppression in which women find themselves from which they cannot—out of their own accord or individual efforts—escape. Yet it may also simply indicate a continuation of the subjugation of women in patriarchal societies that operate on norms that dehumanize women.

For Arendt, politics is the realm of human togetherness where individuals can manifest freedom of action. Such freedom transcends mere calculative/instrumental thinking wherein power has the capacity to emerge and not be eliminated or overcome by violence. As such, politics happens between people. For Arendt, political action transcends mere instrumental rationality that permeates most other human actions that we undertake every day. I need to do X to achieve Y. For example, I need to train if I want to run a half marathon. The means I choose depend on my goal. Things get a bit complicated at the social level: if we want to reduce crime rates, we can say (a) we should increase safety measures, or (b) we should provide better educational opportunities. The options of course are not limited to these two, but ultimately, in putting forth our goals we need to make value judgments about what we deem most apt or better to achieve our aims.

So what does it mean to say that Arendtian political action transcends motives and goals? Surely our collective political actions have motives and goals. Take the political action of protest, for instance. Most of the time, protest is motivated by discontent as well as rage against apparent injustice, and it aims to change the conditions for life in community. However, politics transcends its motives and goals for it cannot be judged by its “success” or “failure” alone. Many acts in the political arena aim to draw attention to an injustice, to raise awareness, or to inform the rest of the community of what is deemed wrong in society: for instance, in a society that rests on the premise of universal equality or principle of equal treatment, an example of such political action could range from legal protests to civilly disobedient acts to emphasize racial inequality in the 1960s. The distinction between political action and violent acts inheres in their disparate principles. Violence is judged by its instrumental character, and in the success or failure of achieving its ends; political action is judged by the principles it enacts (for instance, public freedom, and equality) and the political discourse it generates from the exchange of opinions of its agents.

Politics, as Arendt argues, allows for the creation of a space in which the fact of human plurality can be acknowledged and underscored—where superfluousness can be eliminated rather than reinforced. More importantly, for Arendt, such space is also where power can emerge—the power of a collectivity that does not equate with “strength” or “force” or “domination.” As such, politics becomes the realm where people can act on their shared principles, rather than their personal or group interests that can be “legitized” by appeal to goals to be achieved. As such, the goals of political action do not set the standards of judgment for such action. For Arendt, political action isn’t the same as policy. Yet certain policies keep political potentialities open. For instance, the goal to reduce femicides can be achieved by upholding the policy of punishment of partner violence. This would be in the interest of all women who feel threatened not only by abusive partners and intimate others but also random strangers. In this sense, a politics can be successful if it achieves certain ends. If our end is “increasing welfare,” we can opt for different patterns of taxation or spending. Yet, for “reduction of femicide” to be a political end, femicide first needs to be acknowledged as a social and not a personal or individualistic phenomenon. Brison’s discussion of rape can offer some insight here: “The fact that rape occurs all the time, in places all over the world, may render it less noticeable as a collective trauma, but does not make it an exclusively ‘individual’ trauma.” Similarly, that acts of femicide are not causally related does not prevent the phenomenon from being a social and political one.

Politics, for Arendt, is rather open-ended as it pertains to the possibility of creating and sustaining a world together—where each individual agent can appear in it. Such a possibility of appearance is first and foremost linked to having the means to live among others and be potential equals. What does it take to appear in the world? It takes “initiative,” and “courage” to appear. Yet, at times people are oppressed and cannot appear in the world, or they are violated as soon as they appear in the wrong place at the wrong time: this is when one’s political possibilities or one’s political potential becomes diminished. Simply put, violence doesn’t just destroy lives but also undermines the possibility of politics. The young woman stabbed and killed on the street by her partner can no longer have a voice. Nevertheless, she can have a story. A very recent and vivid example of this is the death of Mahsa Amini...
after being taken into custody by Iranian morality police. Bar On, on the other hand, finds the possibility of political agency in the “becoming a ready-to-fight body”: noting her own story and the ambivalence with which she grappled that led her to discontinue and then resume martial arts training, she shows us from an Arendtean lens, the project of “women’s self-defense,” that which “involves the production of violent bodies . . . can be taken as political.”

As Bar On explains, depending on its “ends,” violence may assume an ethico-political justification that it is not necessarily “evil.” Justification, however, is not equivalent to legitimation. As Bar On notes, “the need for justification arises when there is a suspicion regarding the value of an action. The value of any violent action is necessarily suspect because it is unavoidably destructive. Violent action is, therefore, in need of justification. Bar On states, “the justification of violent action is ‘forward looking,’ due to ‘the instrumental character of violence’ (Young 2007, p. 94).”

In this sense, the ready-to-fight body that is indeed put in position to fight, the violent act has an ethico-political justification.

While Arendt identified the antidote to totalitarianism in the inherent possibility of politics for human beings, Bar On’s antidote to becoming a subject of violence resides in the inherent possibility of resisting such violence, thereby exposing the oppressive structures of society. Nevertheless, Bar On notes (through Young through Arendt): “[O]ne ought to examine whether there are not just any alternatives to violence but especially alternatives that may generate, renew, augment, or institutionally stabilize power and, thereby, reduce the need to resort to violence altogether. The attempt to understand and to make “speakable”—to overcome the “speechlessness” of the horror that inflicted speechless outrage and impotent horror. Bar On demonstrates with nuance that Arendt speaks through her writing and publishing while “she could not form an impression of herself as speaking, as having others with whom she was speaking, let alone having others and herself hear her speak,” that “she necessarily conceived of herself hear her speak,” that “she necessarily conceived of herself as un/speaking.”

Thus, one way to address the structural injustice of violence against women lies in the “speechless horror” that allows for an articulation of forward-looking political responsibility. This articulation inheres in the speech of the victim/survivor—the ability to have a narrative akin to Brison’s “narrative of liberation” to help recover a voice that can belongs to one but speaks to many. Perhaps this is how we can address our losses and help recover a world.
testimony was received in 1994 may have empowered Hill and others to fight for equal justice, but having witnessed a similar scene with Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony in 2018 shows us we have much work to do in order to continue to address this issue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
My thanks to the editors and reviewers for their helpful feedback.

NOTES
3. For the purposes of this paper, I will put aside the additional layer of analysis that is required of the reception of her speech which stems from her identity as a black woman. For her influential argument on the role that racialization plays in the violence against women, see Angela Davis, “The Color of Violence Against Women,” Keynote Address at the “Color of Violence Conference” in Santa Cruz, California, 3, no. 3 (Fall 2000), http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a582.html. Two decades after the publication of this speech, the questions that Davis raises are still not resolved.
6. A Human Rights Watch report from May 2022 spells out the “Turkish state’s failure to provide effective protection from domestic violence, to assist survivors of domestic violence or to punish perpetrators of attacks on women, even when the perpetrator is a serial abuser” (“Combating Domestic Violence in Turkey: The Deadly Impact of the Failure to Protect,” May 26, 2022, https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/05/26/combating-domestic-violence-turkey/deadly-impact-failure-protect).
10. For Arendt, “understanding” offers a type of “equality,” a Heimatsgefuehl (translated in the written text as “like feeling at home”) as she describes in her interview with Guenther Gaus. For this reason, writing and understanding, she thinks are coeval—that writing accompanies understanding—since as human beings we don’t have infinite memory. See “What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Guenther Gaus,” Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations (London: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 13.
13. For instance, the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought back to focus the question of war crimes, as well as the treatment of the Uyghur population in China and many other conflicts revolve around the question of the criminal nature of violence or its potential justifications. There is a separate question of whether human beings have become more or less violent: for such a discussion, see Steven Pinker, The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).
17. While many acts of omission can negatively affect one’s sense of self, on this account, I focus only on intentional acts of harm that affect the person overtly. That is to say, it is from the first-person perspective that this harm is experienced, and not only in the judgment of another. It is in this sense that an act (for instance of deception) that diminishes one’s sense of autonomy (or simply put, her decision-making capacity) will not count as a violation if the person is not aware of it immediately.
20. A similar point can be made about the disproportional harm by police that is suffered by black people and other racialized groups.
21. For a detailed discussion of the experience of the trauma in the aftermath of, for instance, sexual violence, see Susan Brison’s Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). To be sure, Brison’s account takes up the process of the recovery of agency in the aftermath of such trauma.
25. Like Bar On, Garver’s account allows for articulating everyday instances of violence that do not inhere in the actualization of physical violence, but its threat (Garver, “What Violence Is,” 820).
27. For a discussion on power as a potential, see Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 200.
29. Arendt calls it a “temptation” to think power “in terms of command and obedience”—this denotes only a “special case . . . namely, the power of the government” (Arendt, On Violence, 47).
32. Arendt, On Violence, 64.
33. Arendt, On Violence, 64.
37. Her example for this is the primary destruction of the activity of fabrication or production bears: that one needs to cut a tree to make a table. See Arendt, Human Condition, 139.
38. Arendt, Human Condition.
40. Arendt, On Violence, 47.
42. Brison, Aftermath, 44.
43. Brison, Aftermath, 51.
44. For a detailed account of such subjugation, see Robert Paul Churchil, Women in the Crossfire: Understanding and Ending Honor Killing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
46. Brison, Aftermath, 98.
47. Arendt, Human Condition, 176.
48. Twenty-two-year-old Mahsa Amini was killed by the morality police "for not wearing her hijab appropriately" (Peter Kenyon, "It’s been 40 days since Mahsa Amini died in police custody in Iran," NPR News, https://www.npr.org/2022/10/26/1131711204/its-been-40-days-since-mahsa-amini-died-in-police-custody-in-iran."
49. Bar On, Violence, 162.
53. Arendt, Origins, 16. Bar On similarly discusses Arendt’s prefaces from 1950 and 1966 to suggests that the "comprehension" that is alluded to above "means asking question such as ‘What happened? Why did it happen?’ and ‘How could it have happened?’ (Bar On, Violence, 38).
54. See Sari, "(Everyday) Violence."
55. Sari, "(Everyday) Violence." In the APA Blog piece, my discussion takes up the subject of refugee crisis instead of violence against women, but my use of affective judgment to elucidate the phenomenon of speechless horror remains applicable to both examples.
56. Cf. Sari, "(Everyday) Violence." For a detailed discussion on such loss of voice, see Brison’s Aftermath.
61. Cf. Sari, "(Everyday) Violence." Ultimately, for me, this "forward-looking responsibility" stems from an imperative to judge and act in the aftermath of "speechless horror" as a way to "recover a world."

Reflections on My Mentor, Ami
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I should start by noting that I am not an academic—I’m a private practice attorney. That I went to law school at all is one of the many influences that Ami had in my life.

I recall the first time that I visited Binghamton on a trip to see whether the university’s PhD program in philosophy was the good fit it appeared to be from my research. Ami had greeted me with a “Hi” accompanied by her almost startlingly broad, open smile. At that time, she was the department chair, and we talked in her book-lined office about my interests, the program, and life in Binghamton.

For me, going to grad school was a very strange thing to be doing. I was a first-generation college student. My mother worked on the assembly line at a plastics factory and managed to raise three young children after my parents divorced. My father worked at another local factory before transitioning into truck-driving. For college, I commuted to the nearest school. No one in my family really left home, at least not for long, outside of military training or service. Leaving behind south-central Pennsylvania for a lengthy graduate program hours away was a great opportunity, for sure, but also a plunge even deeper into the unfamiliar.

From day one in Binghamton, I had a mentor. And Ami went above and beyond in her mentorship. She took interest, of course, in my academic performance and whether I met program milestones, but also in my wellness generally and how I was acclimating to the change. There was also something about Ami that could get even very reserved people to start talking. It was quite the talent, and it depended primarily, I think, on her ability to quickly establish trust. A certain relatability was also present, as Ami had come quite far from home to be, ultimately, in Binghamton and had surmounted humble economic beginnings.

Most conversations with Ami were not at the university but rather, as many who knew her would guess, at a coffee shop. Before Starbucks, there was La Taza, a lovely, small, independent coffee shop that was right up the street from my Binghamton apartment. Ami was often there, moving about with ease to talk to the people she knew on a vast range of topics. And truly, the range of topics Ami could discuss was vast. She could talk about issues of free will and determinism one moment, and the tiny details of the process that makes plants green the next.

Once settled in, I was enjoying all of the newness—new classes, new books, new theories. Because I was Ami’s student and mentee, engagement with Hannah Arendt’s political theoretical work was a given. Arendt’s notion of a distinct sphere of political normativity, different from morality and generative of special values and principles, fascinated me over a decade ago and ever since. It is a rare Arendt scholar who focuses on this aspect of her earlier political work. Yet by some good fortune I had connected
with the Arendt scholar who did have this interpretive focus, and it ultimately became the conceptual foundation of my dissertation.

The (ambitious) aim of my dissertation was to take what I learned from Ami about the Arendtian concept of worldbuilding from a domestic political context to an international one. Rather than center on constitutions as founding documents, I looked to the UN Charter as a sort of founding document for the post-World War II international context. I chose military humanitarian intervention as the framing issue, as it highlighted both the founding commitment of states to uncharacteristically alienate their sovereign discretion over use of force and also the waning legitimacy of this project when so many states devise whatever justification necessary, humanitarian or otherwise, to get around that founding commitment.

The great luck I had as Ami’s mentee was never clearer, on a personal level, than with respect to one particular event. Around the time of my master’s comps, my father deployed with his National Guard unit to Iraq. The deployment was a shock to me; I had understood his risk of war zone deployment to be negligible. That I had invested countless hours participating in anti-war activism—meetings, demonstrations, college newspaper op-eds—likely was a factor in his reluctance to break the news until his departure date was fairly close at hand. The unprecedented experience of anxiety that set in waiting, checking news, and yet more waiting, was unbearable. As life around me went on as usual, the trouble in my own world was the type of circumstance that could make the difference between managing stress and reaching a breaking point, or between success in my program and needing to take leave, or worse. I was hopelessly mired in work about war, alienated from activism that now felt utterly futile, and gnawingly aware of my distance from home.

But Ami was no stranger to war. Nor was she a stranger to the sort of tensions it could produce, which were in my case solidly anti-war sentiments and total support for my father balanced on either hand. Ami’s routine check-ins on my work and my war front were critical, and they were also the one thing sure to drag me out of my apartment—to, of course, a coffee shop—after my coursework ended. Ami managed her own experience with war, I would think to myself, surely, I could be tougher here. Or, as Ami once memorably put it: “You can cry and work at the same time.” (This is largely true.) In the end, I passed my comps, continued progress on my dissertation, and to my great relief, my father finally came home.

Although I never said as much to Ami, my priorities had shifted at the very time that an ABD student would be preparing for the market. After everything, my commitment to going anywhere in the country, if not the world, to land a tenure-track position was gone. I wanted to stay closer to home. Ami was the person who proposed the law school path. I would still have the PhD, but more doors would open, and I could see whether the leap from philosophizing law to practicing it captured my interest. It all made sense to me, and I applied to law schools, commencing the process that eventually led to my position at a law firm near home.

My departure from academia notwithstanding, Ami’s memorable qualities remain relevant in my life and thought today. Among them her curiosity, a kind of openness to the world and readiness to think about the good as well as the bad within it. And Ami’s kindness, which was a kindness that did not detract from her clarity of thought and firmness of opinion. A savvy negotiator, Ami also seemed to have an innate sense of what could be compromised and when one’s ground must be stood. Her dedication to institution-building, and the perhaps more difficult work of preserving institutional norms, was underpinned not merely by theory but by her actual and remarkable respect for human plurality—our condition of both equality and distinction. Finally, her perspective. Once, when a disagreement among seminar students began to get heated, Ami had intervened to remind everyone, “Hey. It’s okay. We can all go home and get dinner.” It was good advice that I still repeat from time to time.


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INTRODUCTION

Shortly after Bat-Ami Bar On’s passing, her partner, Lisa, contacted me to see if I would be interested in reading a project that Bar On was working on whose topic was refugees, something that I had also been working on over the past several years. She forwarded me a number of files that were in progress at the time of her death. This work contains several different sections on a number of different topics. Though there was a lot of variation in how developed each section was, none was complete. Many are filled with discussions of the various sources that she was engaging with, while her full evaluation is often in a nascent state. Here, I focus on two themes that emerge in these writings. The first is her family and their experience as refugees in 1946, and the second is her evaluation of the EU’s response to the migrant and refugee crisis of 2015. Though fifty years apart, these have interesting overlaps and connections.

Bar On’s family were refugees in the 1940s and this book would have been a very personal one for her. As she writes in what would have been the Preface of the book, “I have engaged in the research and writing of this book because of an intersection between my interests in normative questions about just war and post-war justice, normative questions about territorial borders and migration, and my own maternal family’s history.” What I hope to do below is to bring out these themes—especially the connection between normative questions on borders and migration and Bar On’s family’s history. The project on refugees that she had been working on would have brought the personal and the intellectual together in what I can only imagine would be a profound way.
What we see in Bar On’s discussion of her family’s history is a story of people very similar to the Middle Eastern and African refugees who starting around 2015 attempted to arrive in Europe to claim asylum only to be met with fierce resistance and violence. For both Bar On’s family and refugees today, employing people smugglers was a necessity. How can this reality be squared with the ethics of migration and states’ right to control their borders? On what ground can we say that states are no longer exercising a legitimate right to control their borders when they use the military to keep refugees out?

Bar On’s family shared the experience of many today of trying to seek refuge from persecution only to be turned away. Her family attempted to enter Mandatory Palestine, overseen by the British, but they were turned away and told that they had taken in too many Jewish refugees and had exceeded the economic capacity of the country. They closed the border to refugees and deported her family to Cyprus, where her parents lived in a detention camp.

How does this experience of her family relate to her more abstract, philosophical views about the ethics of immigration? Were the British wrong to deport her mother and other needy Jewish refugees because they believed that they were economic or security threats? Likewise, is the EU wrong today to employ similar tactics against unwanted asylum seekers? Bar On believes that states have a right to control their borders and make immigration policy that allows them to keep their countries secure. Yet despite this right, Bar On is searching for a language to criticize states for what she ultimately calls “illiberal prejudice and ungenerous behavior.”

PART I: BAR ON’S FAMILY HISTORY

Bar On writes,

During a period of about four years, members of my family were involved in a form of people-smuggling and most of them became the subject of an intense political dispute about who is a refugee as distinguished from an economic migrant, what does or does not constitute an illegal human movement across borders, and why does any of this matter at all. Because this dispute was not solved in their favour while they were in transit, my maternal grandmother, my mother, and two of her siblings were all apprehended and held in detention camps. (Preface)

She tells us that her material family’s migration story is a typical one in the years after World War II. Her family left Romania in the hopes of reaching Mandatory Palestine, which at the time was administered by the British.

For my family, the war, their experiences of Romanian anti-Semitism, and their expectations that Romanian Communism would be anti-Semitic changed everything. While some Jews aimed to reach Mandatory Palestine during and after World War II because that was their only option, my family not only wanted to leave Romania but was convinced that for them Mandatory Palestine was the best option. In their view, Mandatory Palestine offered the hope of a Jewish National Home and, therefore, the kind of safety from persecution, pogroms, and genocidal action that they did not think that they could find in post-World War II Romania or elsewhere. (Preface)

Palestine had been conquered by the British from the Ottomans and received the Mandate from the League of Nations in 1922. It authorized them to remain in and govern Palestine not as the occupier of an enemy territory but rather as a legal guardian accountable to the international community. They were expected to govern in a way that both benefited the Palestinian inhabitants and helped to bring about a Jewish National Home in Palestine (according to the 1917 Balfour Declaration).

Part of what the British were expected to do was facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine “under suitable conditions” while “ensuring that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced” (quoting Article 6 of the Mandate). Jewish immigration was guided by a British White Paper from 1922, which stated that immigration should not “exceed whatever may be the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals” and that “persons who are politically undesirable be excluded from Palestine.” Perhaps for these reasons, the British did not allow all Jewish refugees fleeing Europe in the 1940s to enter Palestine. In ways that mirror some of today’s conflicts between state deterrence policies and attempts by migrants and refugees to skirt them, the British used violence to prevent refugees from coming to Palestine. This included Bar On’s family.

In 1946, Bar On’s mother was one of the passengers on a ship called Lochita/Knesset Israel. This ship arrived in Haifa on November 26 and was ordered to be deported, along with every one of the 4,000 people on board. This was one of sixty-five other ships that attempted to get through the British blockade of Mandatory Palestine between the end of World War II in Europe in May 1945 and the declaration of Israeli independence three years later in May 1948. The Lochita/Knesset Israel is perhaps the best known of the ships because of the legal attempt made to overturn the order, even though it was unsuccessful. It stands out in another way: its passengers organized resistance to the British forces that attempted to board the ship to gain control of it. When the British attempted to board, passengers used tins of food as missiles and the British threw tear gas grenades aboard the ship.

Bar On’s mother turned out to be one of about 52,000 people deported by order of the High Commissioner between early August 1946 and late April 1948, just a few weeks before the end of the British Mandate for Palestine.

I asked Bar On’s partner, Lisa, to fill me in some of the Bar Ons’ history and learned that when the Lochita/Knesset was not allowed into Palestine, it was diverted to Cyprus. This is where Bar On’s mother Dutza Nadler met and married Bar On’s father, Yaakov Braun (Braun was later Hebrecized and became Bar On). Bar On was born after her parents arrived in Palestine, on April 26, 1948, two weeks before
PART II: BAR ON’S (NOT SURPRISING) INTEREST IN PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF DETERRENCE POLICIES

In a section of notes entitled “Regulating Migrations in Unruly Times,” Bar On grapples with the obligations of states to the current wave of asylum seekers attempting to enter Europe around 2015. She begins by acknowledging a tension at the heart of the problem: there is a humanitarian crisis involving irregular migrants who are “taking on a great risk at a great cost in an attempt to flee war torn and failed states in order to make better lives for themselves and when possible also for their family members. Many of them are likely to qualify as refugees under the current international refugee regime. No one doubts that.” On the other hand, there is state sovereignty and the right of governments to regulate their borders, a feature of the world acknowledged by international law. In her view, states legitimately need to balance the needs of people crossing the Mediterranean with concerns about security, especially against possible terrorist attacks. As she notes, “border controls seem like a reasonable means of containment and prevention of possible terrorist attacks.”

What obligations do states have to people seeking asylum and to what extent can sovereignty be limited in the name of human rights? Bar On focuses on a particular feature of the current migration crisis, the use of smugglers. In the last twenty years, Western liberal democracies have argued that there are more people seeking asylum in their countries than they can handle and, as a result, they are justified in using deterrence policies to make it harder for people to reach their countries. For example, carrier sanctions mean that commercial travel, such as planes and buses, are fined heavily for transporting people who do not have the correct passports and visas. If you are an asylum seeker without this paperwork, it means that your only option for getting to a country to claim asylum is by hiring people smugglers. Much to the frustration of Western governments, smugglers have been fairly successful in helping migrants reach Europe, the US, Australia, etc. Bar On addresses one EU proposed response to this, namely, deploying the military against people smugglers. Here we see the tension noted above in action: asylum seekers are in desperate need of help, but states have the sovereign right to control their borders and protect their citizens. Would it be wrong for the EU to, for example, deploy the Navy to patrol the waters and make sure people smugglers can’t get migrants close to their territory? She writes, “I believe that though it would not be wrong for the EU to take military action against Mediterranean people-smugglers, assuming it meets all international legal requirements, as things stand at present, such action would be normatively tainted.” Let me try to explain Bar On’s thinking on this.

Bar On understands how problematic the EU’s deterrence policies are and particularly the way that it controls its external borders.
irregular mixed-migration through its three-decade-long development of complex border controls and its use of the Mediterranean as a fortress’s moat. According to Al and similar critics, the Mediterranean mixed-migration crisis is a humanitarian crisis and the EU is not only failing to respond to it as such, its responses have been implicating it in human rights violations and in the deaths of thousands of innocent people.

Is this a justifiable exercise of state sovereignty? While many ethically minded people want to say that it is, Bar On notes that actually making a philosophical argument for this is harder than it might seem.

Amnesty International, for example, in her view makes an argument against the militarization of the EU’s border with language borrowed from the just war tradition.

The normative questions that they raise are about just cause. The implication of the AI’s and similar critiques of the EU is that as exploitative of and dangerous to economic-migrants and asylum-seekers as the Mediterranean people-smugglers are, the EU is likely to be using its military under international legal cover to secure for itself an ability to continue to keep people in need out of Europe.

But in her view, this is not a sufficient argument. “AI and other critics of the EU have to do more than they do in order to establish that the EU does not have just cause to engage its military in policing action against Mediterranean people-smugglers.” In addition, they have to show that the EU has an obligation to open its external borders.

The argument for open borders is, of course, harder to make. There are two ways they might do this. First, drawing on Joseph Carens, she says that they might argue that “open borders are entailed by the liberal emphasis on individual freedom and the importance of individuals’ control of their life-decisions and circumstances.” Alternatively, they could appeal to the arguments made by luck egalitarians who believe that the lucky people who live in EU member states should learn to share better, and in more than a merely philanthropic way, with those less fortunate than themselves rather than deploy the EU’s superior resources and its military to protect luck-based unjust inequalities. From a global-luck-egalitarian perspective there is also a compensatory element to requiring the EU’s lucky people to share their good fortune since European imperialism and colonialism, and therefore also European racism, are historically implicated in the current bad luck of many of the Mediterranean irregular economic-migrants and asylum-seekers.

Though Bar On acknowledges the intuitive pull of these arguments, she is not convinced. While the goal of open borders might be ideally best, she sees it as a “utopian goal.” One of the reasons the global-luck-egalitarian argument fails to convince and trump people’s particularism is because it’s hard to establish exactly what a fair burden might be for EU citizens or how this might work practically. That is, this view cannot say “what it is specifically that the lucky people of Europe should be doing in response to the Mediterranean irregular mixed-migration crisis.” As a result, she concludes, “the argument cannot be used to show that the EU should stop maintaining its border regime and that it has no just cause to deploy a military force as part of its effort to secure its borders against the smuggling of people, as long as it acts within what is permissible given international law.”

Where does that leave Bar On? Remember that her family survived in part by being smuggled into Israel in violation of state sovereignty and fought back against the deterrence policies of the British government that tried to prevent them from receiving asylum. Having this personal connection to the humanitarian crisis, she feels the pull of the ethical demand on the part of refugees to enter Europe. Though she is not persuaded by the above arguments, “There is something about the AI’s and similar critiques of Fortress Europe that nags me, suggesting to me that, nonetheless, something is just not right about the EU’s proposal [to use military force against people smuggling].”

Part of what is wrong is the EU’s failure “to meet reasonable normative expectations that it aid Mediterranean irregular economic-migrants and asylum-seekers in trouble at sea.”

The EU needed to acknowledge that it has responsibility to migrants simply because of geography. The reason migrants aim for the EU is because it is the closest place they believe will be able to help them meet their needs. “Geographic proximity matters normatively in some situations and the situation in the Mediterranean seems to be one such situation. Under a principle analogous to the fort ‘neighbour principle,’ the EU, being aware of the plight of Mediterranean irregular economic-migrants and asylum-seekers and having the capacity to aid, should have been offering them assistance while at sea.”

That they were able to do this became clear when they successfully launched a search and rescue mission in the aftermath of the outcry surrounding migrant deaths. “Operation Triton” successfully and dramatically reduced the drowning of irregular economic-migrants and asylum-seekers in the Mediterranean. She writes, “The sense I am left with when considering the changes in the Triton operation and other developments in the EU as it and its member states respond to the Mediterranean irregular mixed-migration crisis is of an illiberalism that consists of a lack of generosity, and an illiberalism that consists of prejudice.” We see this illiberalism in the refusal of some states to accept refugees as part of an EU relocation scheme. Indeed, it is the countries that we see today so actively receiving Ukrainian refugees who were the most adamant in their refusal. This is what she has in mind when she talks about Europe’s “xenophobic illiberalism,” which she sees as underlying Europe’s policies towards refugees, especially countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, which declared that “they would only consider accommodating Christian asylum-seekers. The Czech Republic expressed concerns about the alien cultures of
asylum-seekers, and Hungary has been staunchly anti-immigration."

It is this illiberalism that Bar On sees as the root problem with the EU’s proposed use of military action against Mediterranean people-smugglers. “It is one thing to have a border regime that regulates human migration. It is a different thing to have a border regime that at the same time gets implicated in the protection of what ultimately are policies that are ungenerous and prejudice laden and exhibit a lack of solidarity with irregular asylum-seekers and even irregular economic-migrants. These illiberality and illiberalism cannot but normatively trouble the EU proposal to use military action against Mediterranean people-smugglers.”

CONCLUSION
To conclude, it’s hard to not wonder how she would have developed this argument and how she would evaluate the treatment of refugees today. I found it helpful to be reminded that though the scale may be different, states have responded to refugees with the same lack of solidarity and generosity in the past. This is an unfortunate case of the more things change, the more they stay the same.

NOTE
1. All quotes in this article are taken from this unpublished manuscript whose working title was *What Shall We Do with These People? Refugees and Post-War Transitional (In)Justices.*
FROM THE EDITOR

Lori Gallegos  
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Given Latin America’s history of struggle with colonial and post-colonial domination, a distinguishing feature of Latin American philosophy has been a concern for freedom from oppression. The body of scholarly work known as decolonial theory examines and aims to challenge the ways in which the patterns of power established as a result of colonialism persist in multiple forms to this day. The two essays in this issue of APA Studies contribute to this area of research. The first provides a deeper understanding of epistemology as a central channel for coloniality, while the second explores the possibility of an authentic, decolonial identity for Latin Americans.

We begin with the winner of the 2022 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought—an essay titled “The Theater of Knowledge at the Zero-Point as a Colonial Enterprise.” In this award-winning essay, Paula Landerreche Cardillo takes up Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez’s engagement with Kant. Her essay traces the way in which a certain kind of epistemology, exemplified by Kant, becomes a tool of the coloniality of power. Through Castro-Gómez’s notion of the “zero-point hubris” Landerreche Cardillo identifies the problems of setting up a universal knower, as European modern thinkers do. She argues that Kant’s epistemology is a mode of colonization, one that makes possible the extraction of other knowledges and resources for the establishment of a ruling class.

Our second essay received an Honorable Mention in the Essay Prize in Latin American Thought. In “Decolonizing the Mind and Authentic Self-Creation a la Jorge Portilla,” author Juan Garcia Torres poses the question: Can a person from Latin America be a Catholic, a feminist, or a democratic socialist in an authentic way, given the colonial origins of these identities? Building on the work of twentieth century Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla, Garcia Torres argues that authentic decolonization of the mind need not involve a blanket rejection of identities originating from the colonizers; instead, it can be understood as a kind of authentic self-creation that is appropriately sensitive to the colonial history of the identities freely chosen by the agent.

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 related to Hispanic/Latinx thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as meditaciones, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

SPECIAL CLUSTER ON THE TOPIC OF STYLE

We invite the submission of articles on style in Latin American/Latinx philosophy. Possible topics include but are not limited to the following:

- The value of style
- Styles in/of living
- Pedagogical style
- History in/of style
- The use of non-traditional or innovative style(s)
- Stylistic pluralism/formalism
- Language and style
- Aesthetics and style

In addition to articles, we will also be accepting the submission of the following:

- Poetry, artistic analysis, or fictional narratives
- Interviews with exemplars of style in Latin American/Latinx philosophy
- Reviews of Latin American/Latinx philosophy that thematize or display unique style(s)

ARTICLES

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

BOOK REVIEWS

Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latinx 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.
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But in asking how taking such a position—that of the zero-

point, or the absolute place of observation for knowledge—is possible, Castro-Gómez uncovers a temporal structure that must accompany this project. This temporal structure must first assume a linear historical evolution and it must also deny the simultaneity of different geographical regions, that is, it must declare that not all geographical regions are on a simultaneous plane. The epistemological rupture that is possible for Descartes, Hume, and Smith is not yet possible for the rest of the world under this model.

The denial of simultaneity assumes that spatially everyone is on the same plane, but temporally, "the West" is the only region that has reached Enlightenment. Enlightenment, in turn, allows the European to establish a spatio-temporal plane of knowledge that gives him the possibility "to name the world for the first time; to draw a border between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge, and moreover to define which behaviors are normal and which are pathological" and thus have the ability to name time and space anew, rendering invisible the very structure of temporal difference that allows for the plane to establish itself as the absolute point of departure.

But in order to establish the transcendental plane of a new beginning, and with it a spatio-temporal structure that is abstracted from the world, it was necessary for the Enlightenment to assume a temporal position of superiority in relation to the "Orient" and the "Americas." Castro-

In in his early works, mainly Critique of Latin American Reason and The Zero-Point Hubris, Santiago Castro-Gómez ultimately aims to answer, in a very Kantian fashion, what makes possible that the Enlightenment can exist in the Americas and can simultaneously carry within itself anti-Enlightenment racial politics. He concentrates on epistemology because it becomes an important tool of the coloniality of power: a certain kind of epistemology (exemplified by Kant) becomes the only legitimate form of knowledge for the Enlightenment. Additionally, this epistemological model becomes the model that makes possible the extraction of other knowledges and also of resources for the establishment of a ruling class that is also the capitalist class, one that, as Andrés Bello did, can write of the happy time when the Americas "[return] to Europe with interest the stream of the Enlightenment."

In what follows, I concentrate on Kant’s epistemology and highlight the importance of looking at the European Enlightenment through the lense of Latin American decolonial thought. I look at Castro-Gómez’s notion of the "zero-point hubris" to explore the problems of setting up a universal knower, as European modern thinkers do in relation to questions of the situation of the knower and the apparatus of enunciation. I argue that Kant’s epistemology is in itself a mode of colonization. Finally, I briefly present a decolonial conception of modernity in relation to Kant’s epistemology in order to highlight virtues and limitations in Kant’s apparatus of knowledge in light of decolonial thought.

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Castro-Gómez analyzes the conditions of reasoning that led to what he calls the "zero-point hubris": "[The] absolute point of departure, where the observer reduces all previously learned knowledge to a tabula rasa." He traces the possibility of inhabiting the zero-point through three radically different thinkers of the beginning of the Enlightenment: Descartes, Hume, and Smith. Although they differ in the methodological presuppositions that establish the condition of knowledge as an absolute point of departure, they arrive at an "observational zero-point capable of guaranteeing its objectivity." The goal, Castro-Gómez explains, is "to convert science into an unobserved observation platform from which an impartial observer is able to establish the laws governing both the cosmos and the polis." Be it by the suspension of ordinary thinking, by empirical observation, or by studying economic activity, these three thinkers agree on the presupposition that society must be understood through a set of impersonal rules mirroring the rules of the physical world. These thinkers establish a "plane of transcendence" that assumes—or rather claims as a consequence of reason—that "human nature is a transcendental sphere valid for all people on earth that functions independently of all cultural or subjective variables."7

The Theater of Knowledge at the Zero-

Point as a Colonial Enterprise: Santiago

Castro-Gómez’s Engagement with Kant

Winner, 2022 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought

Paula Landerreche Cardillo
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

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The denial of simultaneity assumes that spatially everyone is on the same plane, but temporally, "the West" is the only region that has reached Enlightenment. Enlightenment, in turn, allows the European to establish a spatio-temporal plane of knowledge that gives him the possibility "to name the world for the first time; to draw a border between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge, and moreover to define which behaviors are normal and which are pathological" and thus have the ability to name time and space anew, rendering invisible the very structure of temporal difference that allows for the plane to establish itself as the absolute point of departure.

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Gómez turns to Edward Said’s discussion of Orientalism as the establishment of the West and the Orient as temporally different regions and expands this discussion to the Americas. Ultimately, he concludes, this operation was necessary for the moment of rupture that makes the zero-point possible. Moreover, the creation of the West, and therefore also that of the Orient and the Americas, is established to maintain the hegemony of Europe and the subordination of the rest of the world to the European order.

I argue with Castro-Gómez that modernity-coloniality not only establishes the center-periphery model, but rather conceals the operation of coloniality such that: (1) The world-order must be established with Europe as center and the rest of the world as periphery; (2) this world-order must create a hierarchy of knowledge along with a temporal model of non-simultaneity; and (3) Europe becomes, as a consequence of (1) and (2), the center of knowledge and the culmination of a rationality that is ruptured from the time-space that made it possible. This in turn establishes a new time-space of knowledge on a transcendental plane that comes to invisibilize the conditions that made it possible in the first place.

Assuming the zero-point means assuming an absolute epistemological beginning. Descartes’s project, Castro-Gómez claims, eliminates all possible uncertainties to find a solid starting point for knowledge. In this account,

To begin everything anew means having the power to name the world for the first time; to draw a border between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge . . . to situate oneself at the zero-point is to have the power to institute, to represent, to construct a vision of the social and natural world that is recognized as legitimate and underwritten by the state.\footnote{This means that the institution of the zero-point as the non-place for knowledge is directly linked to the power, and therefore the place of power, of the institutor.}

Kant makes a similar move to Descartes in the task of determining grounds, aims, and limitations of knowledge. Kant defines his system of knowledge as an architectonic, a systematic unity not given technically or empirically but through an idea and according to the ends of reason. It provides its ends a priori.\footnote{In this sense, the architectonic of pure reason is not learnt but given, not from its parts, but as a whole. In contrast to Descartes, Kant does not find the ground for knowledge and build on it, but points to knowledge as a systematic unity. Descartes places himself in the zero-point to build and place the border of legitimate knowledge while Kant's architectonic is—a priori, unplaced—the zero-point. Walter Mignolo claims that the problem is that Kant’s architectonic positions itself as the only architectonic of knowledge possible.\footnote{In this sense, operating under the zero-point hubris blinds you to the fact that other people (their existence and knowledges) do not share your problems until you impose your system of knowledge upon them and tell them they are inferior and ignorant, their reasoning is defective, and their sense of the beautiful inexistent.}}\footnote{Kant’s critical project lends itself quite well to this endeavor. In the first place, he is concerned with placing the limits of knowledge. Yet, one of Kant’s conditions for knowledge is that it adds something new. This is why he rejects analytic truths and praises scientific knowledges such as mathematics and physics. This gives us clues about the ambition for the accumulation of knowledge in Kant’s epistemology. I will now take a closer look at Kant’s system of knowledge to understand the notion of “possession of the world” following Mignolo.}

In other words, a single world is established where Europe and its colonies belong to the same spatial plane, but the forms of knowledge that do not correspond to the European model are deemed defective or less advanced. This, Mignolo and Castro-Gómez explain, becomes the justification for the exploitation of the natural resources of the colonized and their subjugation.\footnote{Mignolo states that Kant saw the accumulation of knowledge as an “avid enterprise, parallel to the anxiety to accumulate money and wealth.”\footnote{But what do the accumulation of knowledge and the epistemic possession of the world entail?}}

First, it is important to note that in Kant we can see the crystallization of what the structure of modernity/coloniality made possible. Although he clearly participated in the erasure of other knowledges and the exploitation of the colonized, he is not singularly responsible for it. Rather, Castro-Gómez's discussion of Descartes, Hume, and Smith shows that the structures that rendered European Enlightenment thinking as the epistemological beginning, rendered all other kinds of knowledge illegitimate. In a way, these four thinkers share the desire to establish limits to knowledge to then determine which knowledges are legitimate and which are deficient and/or less advanced. Yet, putting limits to knowledge seems at odds with colonial expansion and the accumulation of knowledge, not to mention the notion of an all-knowing subject or impartial knower that defines the zero-point.\footnote{But, as I mentioned earlier, the zero-point must have limits as it operates under an apparatus of whiteness. It must appear as an absolute epistemological beginning while establishing epistemological limits such that it can subjugate and expropriate the resources and peoples. Thus, the operation of universalization is carried out by placing limits. This apparatus of knowledge production establishes the limits of what is properly knowledge, and thus whoever properly inhabits the place of the knower (and by properly here I mean following the rules and limits of the system of knowledge that establishes itself as legitimate) that can obtain all possible knowledge by subsuming it under this model.}

KANT’S THEATER OF KNOWLEDGE

In “The Darker Side of the Enlightenment,” Mignolo studies the transformation of cartography of the sixteenth century. He focuses on Abraham Ortelius’s Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, the first modern atlas of the world. Mignolo attends to the choice of the term “theatrum.” He traces the origin of the word to the Greek family of “theorin,” theory, showing a relation between the conception of theory and theater. He traces the use of the two terms in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe and finds a notable similarity.
in the use. Both words refer to contemplation, a place for viewing, beholding, and spectating.\textsuperscript{17} Starting from the suggestion that there is a relationship between theater and theory in the modern world, I relate it to the notion of a place of viewing to look at the subject of knowledge and the place of enunciation in Kant.

I mentioned that Kant’s system of knowledge is an architectonic conceived as a whole edifice. Following Mignolo, I suggest that we look at this system of knowledge as a theater. The knower is placed in the theater, and, according to Kant, any subject can be placed there. The theater Kant sets up is the zero-point. It has no geographical location or particular temporality; it is set up as a transcendental plane. The subject is not racialized or gendered. This is already problematic, but for the time being I will set aside those problems to look at the apparatus of knowledge as Kant sets it up.

Let us picture Kant’s theater. To begin with, the theater must be a unity and have limits. According to Kant, the knower will inevitably try to go beyond the limits of the theater. It is in the nature of reason that he does. However, he must understand the limitations of the apparatus of knowledge in order to speculate beyond them. That is, the knower must understand the principles upon which the theater is built. Kant will look at these principles and determine that, to experience objects in the theater, there must be a structure of the theater. He explores this in the “Transcendental Aesthetic.”

We can assume that if we asked Kant to describe the theater, he would describe it thus: There is a stage at the front which is most likely elevated and surrounded/concealed by curtains. On the other side, there are seats, all facing the stage. There must be a distance between the stage and the seats.

Kant writes at the beginning of the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” “The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility.”\textsuperscript{18} In this way, objects affect us but we have a capacity for receptivity, which is necessary for the acquisition of representations of these objects. He continues: “I call that in the appearance which corresponds to sensations its matter, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call the form of appearance... the matter of all appearance is only given to us a posteriori, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind a priori.”\textsuperscript{19} The appearance must have a form and this form must be a priori. Later he will argue that the form is in the knower as space/time.

For Kant, therefore, “We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings and so on from the human\textsuperscript{20} standpoint.”\textsuperscript{21} Going back to Kant’s theater, we cannot say that it exists as something extended. But we can say that the theater is the form of appearance of objects to the knowing subject. The theater is necessary for knowledge, sensibility is necessary for representation. There must be a separation between the subject of knowledge and the object. In fact, Kant writes that “sensibility is a necessary condition of all the relations within which objects can be intuited as outside of us, and, if one abstracts from these objects, it is a pure intuition that bears the name of space.”\textsuperscript{22}

The structure of the theater looks remarkably similar to the structure of sensibility. In order for there to be theater or knowledge, there must be a place of spectating that is at the same time a non-place or any place, a sit in the theater, all theaters, any theater since they are all the same. There must be a separation between the spectator and the object of theater (say, the play) or the object of knowledge. Space is a necessary condition for both theater and sensibility, and therefore knowledge, to happen and the structure must function as a whole.

I claim that we can assume that Kant would describe the theater similarly to how I described it above because this is the basic structure of a theater in the seventeenth century. If we were to describe a theater with a different structure, Kant would deny that the structure could be called a theater because a theater must have this particular structure to function as a whole. Theater, in this sense is the theater, just as in Kant, the architectonic is the architectonic. That is the basis of transcendental philosophy: It assumes universality by situating the knower at the zero-point, and the system of knowledge as the only possible system of knowledge.

Kant’s “theater of knowledge” is not only problematic because it assumes that it is the only possible system of knowledge (or the only legitimate one), but the way the theater is set up is problematic in its own way. As I suggested at the beginning of this section, Kant’s presupposition of what knowledge must be carries his own ambitions to possess the world through understanding.

It could be said that for Kant, to know the object is to colonize it. Mignolo writes that “knowledge itself is an integral part of imperial processes of appropriation.”\textsuperscript{23} Kant’s theory of knowledge, by situating the knowledge in the subject and conceiving it in terms of subject and object, is a praxis of colonization. Kant is not concerned with revealing the things in themselves but rather the things as they can be known, since for him, it is not possible to reveal things in themselves. For this reason, the metaphor of the theater of the world is particularly useful since it assumes an edifice of knowledge that is not found in “nature” but rather set up by the knower(s). The process of knowledge consists of the subject imposing categories on things to understand them and conceive them as objects. It is the subject who judges and creates knowledge, and the knower is assumed to be universal. I have already questioned the universality of the subject and criticized the conception of the zero-point. The problem is that if the theoretician of knowledge assumes that his conception of knowledge is the only possible conception of knowledge and his conception of knowledge implies imposing categories onto things in order to cognize them, he is blind to any other possible knowledge unless it can be translated into his system.

The model of spectatorship, exemplified clearly by Ortelius’s map and Kant’s theater of knowledge, becomes the only legitimate way of experiencing the world. It is important to remember that the possibility of occupying the place of spectatorship as a spectator of the world is brought about
by an operation that erases the material conditions of possibility of an absolute epistemological beginning that, in turn, brings about a position of knowledge that can be displaced. Thus, Kant’s theater or the place of spectatorship is displaceable. It no longer stands in Europe as its center but rather can inhabit the Americas, invisibilizing what made the displacement possible.

Castro-Gómez’s ultimate aim is to show about what makes possible that the Enlightenment both existed in the Americas while carrying with itself what is often thought as anti-Enlightenment racial politics. He concentrates on epistemology because it becomes an important tool of the coloniality of power. A certain kind of epistemology becomes the only legitimate form of knowledge for the Enlightenment. Additionally, this epistemological model becomes the model that makes possible the extraction of other knowledges.

It also becomes a tool for the whitening of the blood in the colonial Americas: Those who adopt the Kantian system of knowledge inhabit a place of whiteness and with it they take part in the ruling class which is also the capitalist class. This apparatus of knowledge is used to extract resources and becomes currency such that, in 1826, Andrés Bello could write that a “happy time” in the future will come “when America returns to Europe with interest the stream of Enlightenment which today she borrows.”

Decolonizing the Mind and Authentic Self-Creation a la Jorge Portilla

Honorable Mention, 2022 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I sketch an answer to questions like the following: Can someone from Latin America be a Catholic, a feminist, or a democratic socialist, in an authentic way? It may appear that the answer is straightforward: “Of course; people from Latin America can authentically adopt these identities, just like anyone else.” This natural answer is a bit facile, however. One’s historical particularities play a central role in one’s abilities to adopt identities. The three identities highlighted—“Catholic,” “feminist,” and “democratic socialist”—are all imported from Europe. This fact matters. Social reality in Latin America has been significantly shaped by European colonization. In fact, during the colonization period, the Catholic identity, for example, played a central role in the process of cementing an oppressive power structure that systematically privileged Europeans and their descendants over native Americans and their descendants. These considerations make it initially reasonable to think that a condition for authenticity, for Latin Americans, is precisely that they remove the yoke of their colonial past; that is, it seems reasonable to think that decolonization of the Latin American mind is a condition for its authenticity. Further, decolonization itself seems to require extirpating ideas and identities originating from the colonizers, especially those used to establish the colonial order.

This raises important questions. To what extent is the Latin American mind a fruit of its colonial genesis? What elements of the Latin American mind are inauthentic internalizations of roles infused or projected onto them by the colonizers? How can a Latin American mind be successfully decolonized? How do the projects of authenticity and decolonization relate? As a Latin American myself, I find these questions both fascinating and existentially pressing.

Notes

8. I use the masculine pronoun throughout the paper because I refer to the European subject that inhabits the zero-point as necessarily masculine (that takes himself as neutral and unsexed). I discuss why this is the case in a longer version of this paper.
16. I want to thank Julián Ríos-Acuña for pushing me on this point. In fact, the seeming contradiction between an absolute epistemological beginning that can be inhabited by everyone everywhere and the apparatus of whiteness as a condition of possibility for the zero-point is an important aspect of Castro-Gómez’s work in The Zero-Point Hubris and one that must be explained in detail.
18. CPR A19/B33.
19. CPR A20/B34.
20. Kant replaces the term “human” with “subjective condition” in the following sentence. I will refer to the subjective condition since there are discussions (such as Charles Mills’s and Santiago Castro-Gómez’s) that question the notion of human in Kant.
21. CPR A26/B42.
22. CPR A27/B43.
Adequately answering them is an enormous project; my goal in this paper is merely to argue that the thought of Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla provides important theoretical tools to make advances in answering these kinds of questions. I argue that Portilla’s notion of authentic self-creation allows for a kind of decolonization that makes it conceptually possible for Latin Americans to be Catholics, feminists, or democratic socialists authentically. That is, authentic decolonization of the mind, I argue, need not involve a blanket rejection of identities originating from the colonizers; instead, it can be understood as a particular kind of authentic self-creation: one that is appropriately sensitive to the colonial history of the identities freely chosen by the agent.

Here is the plan. In section one, I present a standard strategy for understanding the nature of decolonization. This strategy helps situate the account of decolonization I sketch in section two.

SECTION ONE: DECOLONIZING THE LATIN AMERICAN MIND

There is a substantial body of literature engaging in topics like decoloniality, decolonizing knowledge, or decolonizing the mind. Authors writing on these topics engage in interrelated but often distinct projects. My goal here is not to survey this complex body of literature, but to isolate a standard way of understanding decolonization and its connection to authenticity.

This standard strategy for understanding decolonization I label the “building-anew” strategy. This strategy stresses both the need to extirpate ideas originating from the colonizers and the need to rebuild the Latin American mind anew from its own sources. The latter element of this strategy is central to the project of this paper.

1.2 MODEST BUILDING-ANEW STRATEGY

Aníbal Quijano, a theoretical founder of “decoloniality” as a critical concept, is a proponent of the building-anew strategy. Quijano distinguishes between “colonialism” (colonialismo), as State-driven economic and political domination, from “coloniality” (colonialidad), as a pervasive colonial order that generates ways of representing the world and ways of being-in-the-world that justify and perpetuate structures of domination between different races or ethnicities: whites/European as naturally superior and thus entitled to greater portions of wealth and power than non-whites/non-Europeans. A major triumph of the colonial order, Quijano notes, is the colonization of the imagination and ways of representing the world of the colonized; coloniality is established when the colonized internalize the colonial order. Coloniality involves, for example, the aspiration of the colonized to improve themselves by becoming whiter/more European. As Frantz Fanon poignantly notes, “However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: for the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.”

For Quijano, part of the success of coloniality relies on an epistemically pernicious element: the colonial order makes a claim to being total or an exhaustive representation of the way the world truly is. Non-European cultures, and their ways of representing or being-in-the-world, are included in the colonial order as less developed, or less civilized, ways of representing or being-in-the-world whose culmination and maturation is the European culture. This claim to totality is epistemically pernicious partly because it makes the colonial order invisible to those that inhabit it. This is so because dissenting opinions are not permitted any legitimacy; they are, in an epistemically real sense, beyond the total representation of the world and as such unintelligible. At best, these seemingly dissenting opinions are themselves represented in the colonial order as mere clumsy thoughts of inferior minds stuck in under-developed or under-civilized conditions.

As Quijano sees it, then, essential to the success of decoloniality is undergoing a kind of epistemic decoloniality. This epistemic decoloniality involves (i) the rejection of the categories used in the epistemic framework of the colonial order; and (ii) the creation of new epistemologies, or new rationalities and new productions of knowledge, originating from outside the epistemic framework of the colonial order. Authentic decolonization of the Latin American mind, then, requires that it be constructed from epistemic sources other-than those operating within the representation of the world in the colonial order.

The literature also includes a more modest version of the building-anew strategy. We encounter this strategy, for example, in Sánchez’s article on Uranga’s Análisis del ser del mexicano. Sánchez argues that Uranga’s Análisis should be read as an attempt to decolonize Mexican philosophy. Sánchez hints at what decolonization amounts to: “to decolonize philosophy” is in part “to rip it from its colonial roots and build it up again from one’s ground.” Sánchez sees Mexican philosopher Emilio Uranga as doing precisely this. Uranga abandons some Eurocentric philosophical categories and returns to the pre-Columbian notion of nepantla (in-betweness) to ground the ontology of the Mexican, or the Mexican way-of-being.

Uranga’s attempt to decolonize Mexican philosophy is grounded in a modest version of the building-anew strategy. This is so because Uranga does not reject all ideas originating from Europe to carve his philosophical account of the mode of being Mexican. In fact, Uranga, like Sánchez himself, is comfortable using some of the theoretical tools and methods developed by existentialist phenomenologists like Heidegger. That is, Uranga and Sánchez seem to think that Mexican philosophy can be authentic and adequately decolonized even when it permits and actively deploy some philosophical currents originating in Europe.
The account of decolonization I sketch in the next section is a version of a modest building-anew strategy more akin to that of Sánchez and Uranga than that of Quijano.

SECTION TWO: JORGE PORTILLA AND DECOLONIZATION

2.1 PORTILLA AND AUTHENTIC SELF-CREATION

Portilla thinks that there is an important sense in which human freedom creates value in the world. As he sees it, value presents itself to human consciousness in its “pure ideality” and demands its realization in “the objective realm of lived experiences”; put differently, “value solicits its realization,” and, in fact, the mere act of grasping a given value is in part “the fulfillment of that demand” to be realized. Grasping a value and recognizing the value’s demand for its realization is a condition for the central movement of authentic freedom. Authentic freedom is the act of creating value as “an intimate movement of loyalty and commitment” and an “affirmation” towards value and its demands; this creative act is “pure spontaneity” in which “I am alone with myself before the value.”

For Portilla, then, authentic freedom is manifested in creating values in the world. Free acts that create value are also, in an important sense, acts of self-constitution or self-creation. Portilla insists: “Value can also appear as a demand, as a need to fill a void in the very center of my existence. It appears then as a norm of my self-constitution, as the perpetually elusive and evanescent indication of what my being ought to be.” For Portilla, to say that value is a norm for self-creation is not to say that in creating value the agent can herself become a value, but rather the value is a “guide” or “direction and limit” for the agent’s “valued self-constitution” and as such a value “is but the ideal unity of all my actions geared towards” the value. Thus, in freely choosing to create a value, the agent commits to the value and its demands and, further, the agent creates herself as a value-creating self.

Additionally, this kind of self-creation unifies the self across time. Portilla writes: “When I give an adequate response to the demand for actualization inherent to the value, I tacitly commit myself to a behavior, I mortgage my future behavior. . . . I make a pledge with myself in order to maintain a value within existence* in the future.” Put differently, in affirming a value and its demands an agent thereby commits herself to its actualization for some future time and thereby commits herself to being the kind of value-creating self that continues creating this value for this future time.

In sum, for Portilla, authentic freedom is manifested in creating values in the world, and in creating values an agent also creates herself as a value-creating self. Authentic freedom is commitment to a value and in committing to a value an agent commits herself to a future continuation of the creation of this value and to herself as a unified-across-time value-creating self.

2.2 LIBERATION

Decolonization is a kind of liberation—a liberation from the yoke of the colonial past. For Portilla, a central role of philosophical inquiry is to make explicit or present to consciousness what is tacit or concealed in order to liberate the mind from it. Portilla writes: “Philosophy, to the extent that it is a ‘logos’ on humankind, performs an educating and a liberating function. Through it, what is concealed and tacit becomes present and explicit, and something can be transformed by its enlightened action.”

Portilla uses the following example to illustrate the liberating function of philosophy:

I cannot be the same person before and after knowing that, in a sense, the designation “petit bourgeois” applies to me. The word situates me; it creates me like a “flat” pronounced by others which makes me emerge before myself with a new appearance that I barely recognize . . .

But, just as the word integrates me into a whole that overwhelms and alienates me, it can also put me at that ideal distance from myself that is freedom . . . it allows me to adopt different attitudes in relation to myself, and it hands me over to my own decision: it allows me to choose, with full consciousness . . . in a direction opposite to that of psychological habit, tradition, class interest, and so on, the truth sets me free.

Philosophical inquiry can help a person understand and bring to consciousness aspects of identities or ways of relating to the world, like being a petite bourgeoise, that have not previously been transparent or fully conscious to the agent herself. In bringing these tacit or opaque identities to consciousness, philosophical inquiry helps an agent liberate herself by allowing her “to adopt different attitudes in relation” to herself, or different ways of authentically creating herself. I call these “internal acts of liberation.”

2.3 AUTHENTIC DECOLONIZATION A LA PORTILLA

My suggestion is that Portilla’s thought enables us to understand authentic decolonization as a particular kind of internal act of liberation. Philosophical inquiry can allow Latin Americans to come to recognize in themselves identities, or aspects of some of their identities, as internalizations or products of the colonial order. In coming to see a particular identity, say that of being Catholic, as the product of colonization, this self-understanding can overwhelm and alienate the agent from herself, and “it can also put [her] at that ideal distance from [herself] that is freedom” and thereby “hand [her] over to [her] own decision” to “adopt different attitudes in relation to [herself].” Being appropriately sensitive to the colonial origin of one’s identities “sets [one] free” to authentically construct oneself anew from one’s own sources. Importantly, one’s own sources are nothing other than expressions of one’s authentic freedom. Authentic decolonization demands internal acts of liberation which permit authentic self-creation but need not demand abandonment of all identities or ideas originating from the colonizers.
2.4 OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Before concluding, I would like to briefly address two potential objections. One can be articulated from Quijano's perspective and the other from Sánchez's.

One objection is that my proposal fails to come to terms with the epistemic claim to totality inherent in the colonial order. To recognize a particular identity, say being Catholic, as originating from the colonial order is not merely to understand its genesis from which it can be cleanly separated. Instead, the very meaning of identities originating from within the colonial order are inexorably intertwined within the epistemic framework of the colonial order; they cannot be neatly separated from it. Accepting those identities is akin to a previously enslaved person accepting the servile morality used by their enslavers to justify slavery. Given this, the only authentic response for Latin Americans is to abandon those identities and to build new identities from other sources.

I have no space to do justice to an objection of this magnitude. I just want to flag it and to point out that Portilla himself, as I read him, is committed to a conception of freedom as a kind of transcendence that commits him to deny important assumptions undergirding this objection. For Portilla, authentic freedom has the capacity to transcend the limitations imposed by the circumstances in which the agent finds herself. Without defending the claim, I suggest that part of this transcendence capacity of freedom requires the agent’s ability to grasp a given value in a way that is not exhausted by the particular social contexts in which the value has been previously realized. Put differently, for an agent to be able to truly transcend the limits of her circumstance, and to be authentically free a la Portilla, the agent’s grasp of the value in its “pure ideality” must include grasping possible ways of realizing the value in new social arrangements. If so, the intelligibility of a given value is not exhausted solely by its previous social context, including its previous colonial social context. As I read Portilla, that is part of what it is to say that in acts of authentic freedom “I am alone with myself before the value.” If so, the values constitutive of identities, like being Catholic, can in principle be separated from social frameworks in which they are realized.

The second objection comes from Sánchez’s interesting book on Portilla. Sánchez notes that Portilla’s accounts of subjectivity and freedom rest upon an Enlightenment notion of rationality as a human capacity to attain universality and a kind of objectivity that transcends the circumstances of the historical agent. Sánchez sees this conception of rationality with skepticism and notes that it was one of the colonizer’s tools used to establish the colonial order. Sánchez thus dismisses Portilla’s accounts of subjectivity and freedom as ultimately expressions of the colonized imagination of Portilla himself. This worry naturally extends to my account of decoloniality built on Portilla’s thought.

I cannot do justice to this objection here, but I would like to gesture towards a response. It does seem like Portilla uncritically relied upon some theoretical tools originating from the colonizers in his philosophizing. However, this need not be a sufficient ground for rejecting the fruits of his philosophizing in the name of authenticity and decolonization. Instead, my suggestion is that Portilla himself could have applied the account of decolonization presented here not only to social identities like being Catholic or feminist but to the very theoretical machinery he is deploying in philosophizing. Put differently, Portilla could have come to be appropriately sensitive to the fact that the notion of rationality he was employing itself originated from the colonizers, and this realization would put him at “that ideal distance from [himself] that is freedom” to choose whether to endorse that conception of rationality in his philosophizing. If the account works for social identities, it can work for theoretical tools too. If so, Portilla could have freely and authentically accepted both social identities like being Catholic and feminist and theoretical tools like the Enlightenment notion of rationality. The same holds for contemporary Latin American thinkers.

CONCLUSION

Can a person from Latin America be a Catholic, a feminist, or a democratic socialist authentically? Given the history of European colonization, it may seem that authenticity demands that Latin Americans abandon these, and all other, identities originating from the colonizers. In this paper, I have provided some reasons for thinking that this initial appearance need not be correct. Relying on the thought of Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla, I have sketched an account of decolonization as authentic self-creation that permits, at least in principle, that Latin Americans adopt identities originating from Europe authentically.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. This thought is in several respects analogous to one of Simone de Beauvoir’s main claims in her important work The Second Sex. The claim is that for women to be authentic they must do away with their status as Other, projected onto them by men. Authenticity requires that women assert their subjectivity and demand recognition and reciprocity from men, which would in effect do away with their status as Other and reclaim their status as subject. Simone De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. (Originally published in 1949.)

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9. Enrique Dussel in his classic Filosofía de la Liberación makes a similar point over a decade earlier (Dussel, Filosofía de la liberación [Mexico: EDICOL, 1977], 1.1.4.1).


12. Quijano suggests how this positive construction of identities might be attainable. It must begin, he insists, by destroying or undermining the epistemic claim to totality inherent in the colonial order. He suggests that such an epistemic claim can be undermined only by abandoning the Enlightenment’s notion of rationality as universality and by engaging in a multicultural dialogue between competing notions of rationality that do not make a claim to totality or universality: He writes, “Epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings. . . . Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnic tradition be taken as a universal rationality” (“Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” 177f).


15. Sánchez notes that part of what makes Uranga’s work an exercise in decolonizing Mexican philosophy is that it abandons the European “metanarrative” of true philosophy as “pure and abstract universality” (“Emilio Uranga’s Análisis del ser del Mexicano,” 64). Sánchez also insists that Uranga’s work is authentic Mexican philosophy: “In a broad sense, the Análisis is a philosophical consideration of a way of life from the point of view of that life, not from an anonymous view from nowhere, and, as such, the clearest example of authentic Mexican philosophy” (“Emilio Uranga’s Análisis del ser del Mexicano,” 65, emphasis added). For Sánchez, then, Mexican philosophy can be authentically decolonized even when it permits and actively employs philosophical methodologies originating from Europe, like existentialist phenomenology.

16. What exactly “value” amounts to for Portilla is a controversial matter. Sometimes Portilla sounds like a Platonist by describing value in “its pure ideality,” which is contrasted with “the world of reality” (F 18/MS 129). Other times he explicitly describes value as a kind of Kantian idea that is “simply a direction and limit of my transcendence” (F 33/MS 142). Portilla’s commitment to existentialist phenomenology leads him to understand ontological questions about the nature of value as secondary to, and dependent upon, a phenomenological description of value as it presents itself to human consciousness in daily life: “What matters is to find out the way in which a value manifests itself in spontaneous consciousness, independently from its ontological or metaphysical quality . . . . It interests us little to know whether values are entities that float beyond being. . . . Such problems can only emerge with regard to philosophical reflection directed toward such entities” (F 31/MS 140); instead: “What interests us is to clarify the way in which value gives itself in daily life, before any speculation about its essence, its hierarchy, or its polarity” (F 31-2/MS 140). Using this methodology, it can be noted that value presents itself to human consciousness in two different ways: (i) value as “constitutive elements of the things themselves” like “The coolness of water or the delicate flavor of a fruit” which do not require freedom to support them in existence (F 36/MS 144); and (ii) value as a demand upon one’s freedom for its realization in the realm of lived experience, like “Justice” as “justice that is to be realized in the community” (F 32/MS 141). It is this latter way in which value presents itself to human consciousness that matters most for Portilla, and that matters most for this paper.

17. F 18/MS 129.

18. F 18/MS 129.

19. F 19/MS 129.

20. F 18/MS 129.

21. Portilla tends to use the term “self-constitution” (autoconstitución) with more frequency; but at least on one occasion (F 34/MS 142) he uses it synonymously with “self-creation” (autocreación). I will thus be using these terms interchangeably.

22. F 32/MS 141.

23. F 33/MS 142.

24. F 19/MS 129.

25. F 16/MS 126–27.

26. F 16/MS 127.

27. For Portilla internal acts of liberation “are possibilities of freedom . . . that do not require the creation of a new real order of the world but that are free variations of attitude within pure interiority” (F 62-3/MS 168). These internal acts, “the free variations of my subjectivity, the changes of attitudes in pure interiority—some of which can be characterized as liberations and that produce a concomitant change in the appearance of the world” (F 63/MS 169, emphasis added). These internal acts of liberation are thus themselves acts of authentic self-creation.

28. F 63/MS 169.

29. Audre Lorde’s famous warning that “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” resonates well with this objection (Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches [Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1984], 110–13). There is something to this warning. That is, there are some colonizer’s tools that will never undo the colonial order (say, the idea that what is white/European is superior by default or simply because it is white/European). The main point of this paper is to provide some reasons for thinking that not all tools used by the colonizers are on a par, some of these tools can be used outside of the colonial order.

30. Portilla writes, for example: “Humans are beings of such a nature that, even if by their corporeality they participate in the way of
being of things, they are capable of transcending them. . . .
Humans are capable of setting goals that can go beyond their
own situation and the present state of the world, taken as a
whole. By virtue of the form of his or her being itself, a human,
each human, is beyond him- or herself and his or her physical
boundaries, beyond his or her body and situation” (F 60/MS 166).

31. F 19/MS 129.
32. Carlos A. Sánchez, The Suspension of Seriousness: On the
Phenomenology of Jorge Portilla (Albany: State University of New
33. Sánchez, The Suspension of Seriousness, 92ff.
35. In fact, this notion of rationality was used by the colonizers to
establish the colonial order (see Santiago Castro-Gómez, La
Hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva
Granada [1750–1816] (Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana,
2010).

36. There is something peculiar about this response that I want
to highlight: namely, it presupposes the very account of
decoloniality it uses to decolonize the mind of the theorizer
building the account of decoloniality. That seems problematic,
but I want to suggest it need not be. A comparison to a response
to Hume's problem of induction can help here. Hume notoriously
argued that inductive reasoning is unwarranted because it must
presuppose the very thing it is trying to prove, namely that the
future will resemble the past. An interesting reply to Hume is
to provide an inductive argument for the epistemic validity
of inductive reasoning. That is, it is reasonable to think that the
future will resemble the past because in the past the future has
resembled the past. This response will, of course, not convince
Hume, for this inductive argument for the epistemic validity
of inductive reasoning presupposes what it is trying to prove,
namely the epistemic validity of inductive reasoning, and that
was Hume's original criticism. However, this need not be a
problem for the proponent of the reasonableness of inductive
reasoning herself. Likewise, I want to suggest, utilizing an
account of decolonization to decolonize the theoretical tools
used to build the account of decolonization need not be a
problem for the proponent of this decolonization account, even
if it does not move those that find the account problematic.

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art from philosophical and political discourse.
FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry  
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This edition of APA Studies in Native American and Indigenous Philosophy first reports on two sessions that took place at the recent Eastern Division meeting held in Montréal. Both were on Thursday, January 5. As part of the Invited Symposium on Indigenous Philosophy in North America, Shelbi Meissner of Georgetown University discussed work that will appear in Hypatia journal of feminist philosophy. Andrew Smith gives an overview of Meissner’s argument. And as part of the Teaching Hub, Andrea Sullivan-Clarke of Windsor University and Andrew Smith of Drexel University led a session on Best Practices for Introducing Indigenous Philosophy to Your Syllabus. Materials on the session, including a handout distributed by Sullivan-Clarke and the further development of thoughts by Smith, are included here.

This edition also includes a review, by Dennis H. McPherson, Tracy Shields, and J. Douglas Rabb of Lakehead University, of both the multi-volume set, Honoring the Circle put together by Stephen M. Sachs and numerous colleagues, and an earlier volume, Recreating the Circle, by LaDonna Harris, Stephen M. Sachs, et al., that has been recently reissued.

ARTICLES

Report on the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting 
Invited Symposium on Indigenous Philosophy in North America

Andrew Smith  
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“Indigenous Philosophy in North America.” Really APA-E? This is the best you can deliver? The work currently being produced in Indigenous philosophy—Indigenous philosophies, more accurately—is not just among the most cutting edge in the discipline today but also immeasurably methodologically and conceptually varied. By comparison, this title is hopelessly general and sadly simplistic.

Thank goodness that the symposium itself more than made up for these shortcomings. Initially, Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner (Georgetown University) and Dale Turner (University of Toronto) were scheduled to present. While Turner was forced to bow out beforehand, Meissner delivered an incredible talk to a large and engaged audience.

Meissner’s talk was based on an article forthcoming in Hypatia, “‘World’-Traveling in Tule Canoes: Indigenous Philosophies of Language and an Ethic of Incommensurability.” Here’s the abstract:

Indigenous language activists talk about incommensurability all the time—in interesting ways that link language and knowledge as disentangleable components of Indigenous lifeways. According to many of these scholar activists, what is untranslatable about Indigenous languages is often what is incommensurate about Indigenous worlds. Drawing upon resources from Indigenous language reclamation work, I outline here a non-exhaustive taxonomy of incommensurability in the Indigenous philosophy of language literature, and gesture at the ways coalitional relationships might be built that hold 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 fall 2023 issue, please submit your work by June 15, 2023.
space for these different varieties of incommensurability. For ease of explication and to honor Indigenous ways of knowing, I employ here an organizational metaphor rooted in my own communities’ traditions of canoe voyaging to organize three forms of incommensurability that emerge from Indigenous philosophies of language; these forms are Impassable Incommensurability and Strategic Impassable Incommensurability: (Big Water Through A Rock Garden), as well as Incommensurability With Technical Passages: (Heavy Water Through A Rock Garden). These forms of incommensurability, as they spring from Indigenous philosophies of language, each lend themselves toward nuanced insights for careful and considerate world-traveling (a la Lugones) that holds space for epistemic and linguistic sovereignty.

Meissner began by discussing an informative exchange on incommensurability in Inuktitut between Derek Rasmussen, Tommy Akukukjuk, and elder Joanasie Akumalik. She next walked the audience through some key concepts in Indigenous philosophies of language and then considerations regarding incommensurability and world traveling, a notion first introduced by María Lugones.

The high point of the talk was Meissner’s specification of three forms of incommensurability that operate analogically to traditional Luiseño (Payómkawichum) understandings of the passability, or lack thereof, of rock beds in streams using tule canoes. Meissner highlighted that she isn’t taking a position on the ethic of incommensurability or capacities for world-traveling. Rather, she’s offering a conceptual taxonomy of possible positions. She does conclude, though, that it is important to acknowledge that not all worlds—i.e., knowledge systems—are open or navigable, that world and fluency aren’t metaphorical in many Indigenous linguistic spaces, that canoes may be able to be retooled in some circumstances through shared labor, and that those who rely on guidance for world-traveling should be sure to tip our guide!

The talk was quite well received. Audience questions included questions about Lugones’s defense of world-traveling, the capacity for a just ethnology, and the prospect of ethical work by settlers with Indigenous language reclamation projects, including with the Lumbee and Eastern Band of Cherokee. Meissner held the floor for well over an hour with both intellectual passion and cutting humor.

Symposium title definitively defied.

Best Practices for Incorporating Indigenous Philosophy into Your Syllabus: Teaching Hub Sessions at the Eastern Division APA 2023

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

My colleague Andrew Smith (Drexel University) and I recently participated in a Teaching Hub at the meeting of the APA Eastern Division. Given the number of questions I receive about incorporating and teaching Indigenous philosophies, I considered the invitation as an opportunity for outreach. Many universities and colleges are concerned with issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, but the particulars of Indigenous philosophy (especially that of First Nations/Native Americans) can be a challenge, and settler colonialism has made it a challenge to collaborate.

Andrew and I believed a session, which included teaching from the perspectives of an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous ally, might be a way not only to provide information, but also to model a respectful scholarly relationship. We also believed that it would be beneficial for those in attendance to see the different approaches to teaching Indigenous philosophy. Our session included presentations from each of us, but at different times, we also worked together to answer questions from the audience. In this article, I describe the two presentations and conclude with some remarks regarding decolonizing the classroom.

Although I had prepared a handout (included below), I was eager to hear what questions the audience may have. I wanted to be sure that we had a chance to listen to the concerns of our fellow teachers, and, I must admit, I was very curious about what was on their minds with respect to teaching. The questions did not disappoint. In fact, they were much different from what I expected. I assumed that many were first-timers with respect to teaching Indigenous philosophy. I was relieved that my assumption was wrong. The questions were much more sophisticated; they ranged from how to be critical of Indigenous philosophies, to incorporating decolonizing pedagogy, as well as worries about cultural appropriation when teaching.

I appreciated the concern and the thought that the audience had given to centering Indigenous philosophy in their courses, and I acknowledged that (as a member of the Muscogee Nation) I am also a settler as my people are not from the Windsor area. In addition, I do not limit my teaching to Muscogee philosophical thought. I noted that care must be exercised with respect to the material used. Within and between the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, protocols and respect is required. One should have the permission to use Indigenous materials, especially if using the stories and referencing the cultural practices of a particular community.
One best practice, especially if one is starting out to incorporate Indigenous philosophy in their courses, is to rely on the texts that are provided. For my presentation, I used a couple of stories from Lee Hester’s article, “Choctaw Conceptions of the Excellence of the Self, with Implications for a Native Education.” Before I use others’ work, I am careful to note that I am not a member of that community and that I am not teaching one to be a member. My use of stories or cultural practices in the course is strictly from the place of scholar. For example, with the use of Hester’s article, I am teaching about the values that he discusses and I note the use of stories to convey information. I believe that with whatever material you teach, you must provide context. This is especially the case when students may confuse what it means to study philosophy! Those students who do not understand what philosophy is may register for a class thinking they will gain access to cultural practices and knowledge. I wish that I could say the new age thinking with respect to Indigenous knowledge has gone by the wayside, but it is not the case in my experience.

I found the initial question from the audience, which focused on the critique of Indigenous philosophy, the most challenging, but in a good way. It prompted me to think about what I do in the classroom when presenting Indigenous philosophical thought. While critique is part and parcel of what we philosophers do and teach, there are times when it does not seem appropriate. For example, in an introductory course, I may pair non-Indigenous readings on determinism and libertarianism, encouraging students to critique one view of free will using the resources of the other. I think some Indigenous philosophy can be treated in the same way. For example, you might use the account of a contemporary Indigenous scholar (like my work on allyship or land acknowledgement statements) and offer a critique of my view. For other cases, like creation stories that contain worldviews, a best practice might be to attain understanding, especially given how complex some worldviews are.

Both Andrew and I emphasized the need to be thoughtful and respectful when teaching Indigenous philosophy. The instructor must be aware of their social privilege and their relationship with Indigenous peoples. When an audience member voiced their concern about whether they are practicing appropriation when adopting Indigenous virtues, I think they are on the right track to being respectful of the people and their philosophical thought.

There is a move on campuses to decolonize and indigenize, although I am not sure that anyone knows exactly what that means, or if it is even possible in Western institutions of higher learning. Andrew’s presentation was a timely contribution to this issue. How are we to teach in a way that is appropriate for today’s student; one who may be suffering trauma, enduring great stress, and undergoing anxiety? I appreciated Andrew’s candid and compassionate discussion of how he has changed his policies with respect to teaching and the types of responses he has received from both students and administration.

In his classroom, Andrew removes the hierarchy typically present in Western styles of teaching. It isn’t simply rearranging the desks to create a circle or providing a talking stick. (Though those methods may be of use in some classes.) Andrew creates policies for the course that draw upon the Indigenous values of respect and autonomy. Andrew creates a relationship with his students that leads to surprising results. He actually structures the course so that grades take a backseat. The student ultimately decides whether to continue to attend without worry about their final grade.

It is an interesting approach and Andrew would be the first to admit that his class sizes are small, that he has tenure, and that it requires an unbelievable amount of trust. But as I listened to his talk, I was struck by how Indigenous the design was. If you consider the Indigenous way of conveying of information through stories, the conclusions are often left to the listener to determine. Stories may be used at different times for different purposes, but the point of the story is not to drum a particular conclusion into the mind of the listener, but to have them reflect on the right way to live. Storytelling is, of course, a small part of a network of practices and ceremonies that comprise a way for the individual to live in the right way. Andrew allows his students to make their decisions (what a perfect thing at the age when you are becoming an adult). And he mentioned that they still attend!

A final question, after Andrew’s presentation, seems apropos to any instructor teaching the philosophy of marginalized courses at a predominantly white institution: How to motivate students to see their privilege, respect the views of other racial groups, and acknowledge their participation in colonialism? We teach at varied institutions and for some the task may be easier than for others. Recently, I have experienced pushback from students who do not believe that they benefit from colonialism. One audience member pointed out that one might try to show empirical data in order to make their point. I think that is a good start, but I also find that particularly resistant students cling to settler moves to innocence. In one of my courses, we watch a documentary that describes an Indigenous alternative to the treatment of alcohol. It is called Poundmaker’s Lodge: A Healing Place. After watching the documentary, several students shared that they did not know the role that settlers played in contributing to the substance use in many Indigenous communities. I think that perhaps, given how history is taught, some students do not see the work of colonialism and how it is still present today.

I do not claim that with the right evidence resistant students will change their mind. That is part of the Indigenous way of learning. I provide you the stories, and you are left to decide what you will do. It is a risk, but so was the strategy that Andrew implemented in his course. It was a risk, and while not every student will attend, those who do are the better for it. For me, as an Indigenous scholar, I left the session feeling optimistic. The number of allies is increasing, and the types of questions are improving. I hope the changes continue for future generations.
5. Suggestions

a. Avoid the strong teacher centered, top-down dissemination of knowledge

b. Do not use Indigenous resources to support colonial agendas/projects

c. Talking circles, Sharing subject-focused experiences

d. Incorporate Indigenous content (materials, stories, guests)

e. Have an appreciation for the diversity of First Nations, Metis, Inuit People

f. Provide opportunities for student problem-solving/decision-making

g. Create a sense of community

h. Challenge stereotypes (Savage, Noble Savage, Warrior, Princess)

i. Challenge racist assumptions (Free College, Avoid Taxes, Poverty)

j. Seek out resources

i. Coordinator of Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy

ii. Centres for Teaching and Learning

iii. Librarians and Library Research Guides (Univ. of Indiana)

iv. Indigenous Canada Course (U of Alberta)
https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html (massive open online course)

v. Take a course with an Indigenous Scholar

vi. APA Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy


NOTES

1. For the citation details, see the handout.


Handout: Decolonizing Pedagogies

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

1. Locating and Centering

Important Note:

Decolonization is not “integration” or the token inclusion of Indigenous ceremony. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of denial to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting cultural perceptions and power relations in real ways.

– Paulette Regan

2. Concern

Revising the content of education to better reflect Indigenous perspectives is often the focus of curricular reform. However, revising pedagogy used to produce and transmit Indigenous curriculum content can be equally important to effectively changing educational practice to make it more inclusive, holistic, and reflective of Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

3. What can we do to decolonize our pedagogies?

a. Acknowledge that the history of education in colonial societies, like the US and Canada, was (sometimes still is) a history of assimilation of Indigenous peoples

b. Recognize that this history produced "cognitive imperialism" which means the imposition of Euro-centric/Western ways of knowing, teaching, and learning as being "superior"

c. Be willing to admit that racism associated with the North American colonial legacy is not a thing of the past but persistent and deeply embedded with questions of Indigenous-settler relations, politics, land rights, and identity claims

d. Reflect on and discuss these conflicts with your students and with each other regularly


NOTES

1. This handout is a condensed version of Heather E. McGregor’s Decolonizing Pedagogies Teacher Reference Booklet, a Service Project for the Aboriginal Focus School, Vancouver School Board. See http://blogs.ubc.ca/edst591/files/2012/03/decolonizing_pedagogies_booklet.pdf.

2. To understand the potential of decolonizing pedagogies is partly to understand that there is no simple or fail-safe formula that can be used to guide teachers.

6. Indigenous students are not sources for examples.

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**Indigenous Pedagogies for Burned-Out Students on a Burned-Out Planet**

Andrew Smith
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**ABSTRACT**

With each passing term students in my environmental philosophy courses are increasingly burned out, just like the world they inhabit. They’re committed to pursuing ecological well-being and climate justice, even accepting these pursuits as their generation’s singular responsibility. But given their subjection to key structural deformities that prevail in the United States, they’re also acculturated to shoulder undue blame for ongoing setbacks and for the debilitating conditions—including generalized anxiety, clinical depression, ADHD, and OCD—they nearly all suffer from partially as a result. This dynamic is emblematic of their form of struggle with these structural deformities, but it’s hardly the only feature of that struggle and not always the most prominent feature. I see no obvious ways to break free from this and other such dynamics. Still, thanks largely to guidance from Indigenous scholars who generously share their experiences with pedagogies aimed at sustaining their communities within a settler state bent on their destruction, I do at least have some ideas about how to counteract the worst of my students’ suffering.

Each [Indigenous resistance] movement rises against colonial and corporate extractive projects. But what’s often downplayed is the revolutionary potency of what Indigenous resistance stands for: caretaking and creating just relations between human and other-than-human worlds on a planet thoroughly devastated by capitalism.

— The Red Nation

You think any of us matter beyond what we can do for them? Whether we obey or not?

— N.K. Jemison

One breakdown away from a grippy sock vacation.

— Sticker on a student’s laptop

The fall 2022 term, just completed as I write this essay, was genuinely awful. Even measured against terms during the height of the pandemic, it was the most difficult I’ve experienced since I began teaching over two decades ago. While the proximate cause likely has to do with idiosyncrasies of my home institution (and perhaps my choice of introductory material), I have a strong suspicion that the ultimate cause involves a much bigger set of issues that many fellow teachers in higher education are dealing with as well.

Given my research interests and my home institution’s needs, my teaching consists almost exclusively of courses centered on topics in environmental philosophy. This past fall I taught environmental ethics. Among our readings, I included material from a memoir written by Greta Thunberg and her family. While it didn’t go over any better than most of what we covered, the following lines—from Greta’s mother, Malena—help us, I think, to begin to capture why:

We live in a time of historical abundance. The world’s combined resources have never been greater. Just like the chasms dividing rich and poor. Some have so insanely much more than they need. Others have nothing.

At the same time the world around us is only faring worse. The ice is melting. Insects are dying. The forests are disappearing, and the oceans and other ecosystems are struggling more and more each day.

Like so many people around us.

People who have fallen apart like we fell apart, people who are tattered and torn, [...] people who truly live in symbiosis with the planet they inhabit. Not the symbiosis we usually talk about, the one we associate with a down-to-earth life in harmony with nature.

This is about a new unanimity: a new chord. This is about burned-out people on a burned-out planet.1

Do I have some quibbles with Malena’s comments? Sure. But they do capture what I see when I look out at my students from the front of the classroom.

My students are tattered and torn. They are falling apart, if they haven’t already. If they’re lucky, they’re still able to engage in most daily essentials and perhaps a few distractions. But my impression is that most of them lack the wherewithal right now to do much that they would deem genuinely worthwhile. In a classroom full of people otherwise committed to struggling for ecological well-being and climate justice, this is just devastating. As the world around them and its living communities continue to fare worse, here they are trying just to put one foot in front of the other.

Yes, Malena’s right. My students are increasingly burned out, just like the planet they inhabit. They’re well aware that others are far worse off than they are. But in this case, “first-world” problems—including being able to afford astounding tuition costs to suffer together at a modestly
well-heeled institution—are still problems. They’re “symptoms of exactly the same disease,” Malena contends, “a planetary crisis that arose because we have turned our backs on each other. We have turned our backs on nature. We have turned our backs on ourselves.”

Who exactly we are, according to Malena, bears discussion elsewhere. But if my students are afflicted by a disease, it’s heavily reinforced by a nexus of institutions—educational and otherwise—characterized by what Esme Murdock (2022) calls structures of disablement. Structures of disablement compel one to engage in practices that are profoundly damaging to the planet, to others, and to oneself. At the same time, they support pathologizing resistance to and noncompliance with these practices and invalidating resulting trauma. Navigating structures of disablement isn’t optional. Doing so isn’t my students’ path of least resistance. There’s no other path they can take. Traveling it is required for them to live and make a living.

Somatically, my students get it. Their pinched faces and slouched postures don’t lie. Nor does their dark revelry in a common Gen Z joke about needing a “grippy sock vacation”: a lengthy inpatient stint at a psychiatric facility. But, for reasons that bear attention, the very structures of disablement that hold my students captive—including those operative within institutions of higher learning—systematically lead them to misinterpret their somatic experiences in a manner that exacerbates their suffering. Again, they’re committed to pursuing ecological well-being and climate justice, even accepting these pursuits as their generation’s singular responsibility. They’re also acculturated to shoulder undue blame for ongoing setbacks and, worse still, for the debilitating conditions—including generalized anxiety, clinical depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)—they nearly all suffer from partially as a result. This dynamic is emblematic of their form of struggle with structures of disablement, but it’s hardly the only feature of that struggle and not always the most prominent feature. And while I see no obvious ways to break free from this and other such dynamics, thanks largely to guidance from Indigenous scholars who generously share their experiences with pedagogies aimed at sustaining their communities within a settler state bent on their destruction, I do at least have some ideas about how to counteract the worst of my students’ suffering.

Admittedly, like me, most of my students are historical beneficiaries of settler state violence. But one can benefit from and be subject to said violence at the same time. Indeed, the perpetuation of the settler state depends on it, as we’ll see specifically with respect to compulsory schooling. Before we get to this, though, let’s talk a bit more about somatics.

THE PERVERSIVENESS OF STRESS CONDITIONS

Malena relays that for the first decade of Greta’s life, she was a happy and precocious child. Bright and inquisitive, she excelled in all educational pursuits. But at age eleven, things changed dramatically. Greta began exhibiting signs of distress, particularly in relation to school. She cried getting ready for school, on the way to school, and pretty much continually in school until Svante, her father, picked her up (often early) and brought her home to her only source of comfort, the family’s golden retriever Moses. Slowly, Malena relays, Greta began “disappearing into some kind of darkness, and little by little, bit by bit, she seemed to stop functioning. She stopped playing the piano. She stopped laughing. She stopped talking. And. She stopped eating.”

After visiting numerous doctors, Greta was diagnosed with autism, clinical depression, generalized anxiety, and OCD. Her younger sister Beata—prone to bouts of aggression, irritability, and insouciance—was diagnosed shortly thereafter with ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). Typically, members of the medical community treat psychiatric diagnoses such as these as explanations for a person’s behavior. Malena instead takes them to be indicators of pervasive “complications that are very often stress related. More people simply have cause to investigate why their everyday lives don’t function as other people’s lives seem to function. More and more need tools to describe, for example, functional impairment.”

Ruinous landslides, deforestation, soil erosion, floods, droughts, and sea level rise are just a few of the most obvious manifestations of the current ecological–climatological crisis, Malena notes. Less obvious are widespread, debilitating stress conditions. Greta, and likely Beata too, “simply couldn’t reconcile the contradictions of modern life. Things just didn’t add up.” How was it possible that the world’s wealthiest nations supposedly couldn’t afford to provide for climate migrants or offer equitable financial support to nations of the Global South suffering disproportionately from the impacts of climate change? Why did so many humans continue to consume environmentally destructive industrially processed ground-up muscle of other-than-human animals subject to enslavement, torture, and slaughter? Who on earth could overlook that we inhabit a world awash in plastic toxins when a garbage island larger than Mexico was floating in the South Pacific?

While students in Greta’s class were visibly horrified by phenomena like these when shown films about them during class, out in the school corridor migrants, livestock, and plastics were quickly forgotten as students’ conversations turned to upcoming vacations and shopping trips. They seemingly had left their horror in the classroom. But Greta couldn’t. No wonder she felt a crushing sense of helplessness and hopelessness. No wonder she struggled day after day trying to make sense of dystopian socioeconomic conditions that pass for normality. Malena suggests that what ultimately set Greta definitively apart from her peers was that, try as she might, she couldn’t work out the equation they had solved, “the equation that was the ticket to a functioning everyday life.” Her peers may have been distraught by what they learned. Still, they adapted, Malena concludes. “As you do.”

But I don’t think this is any more plausible than Malena’s assertion that the prevailing cause of our problems is that we (whoever we are) suffer from a common disease.
past term was only the worst in a long chain of terms in which I encountered classrooms full of students struggling with stress conditions. Very few students seem to me to have the capacity to adapt. Most have worked out how to put on a game face both inside and outside the classroom, which surely sets them apart from Greta. At best, though, this is just a mask for their suffering. It’s no salve. But, of course, students have learned to function within a system of schooling that incentivizes prioritizing surface concerns over content. They’ve long since metabolized the basic values of a pedagogical culture that demands, to the best of their ability, that they conceal their deviations and weaknesses. But my students are not okay. Not most of them anyway. Even if they’ve been trained to uphold the illusion that they are.

Numerous studies offer evidence that societies across the Global North are prototypically afflicted with high rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, addiction, schizophrenia, and the so-called 4As: ADHD, autism, allergies, and asthma. It’s no coincidence that people in these societies are awash in industrial toxins, increasingly overfed yet undernourished, sedentary, sunlight deficient, and sleep deprived. But at least two other overarching social dynamics also are at play.

First is the pervasive experience of a quintessential American affliction, chronic loneliness. “As affluence and urbanization rise in a society,” Sebastian Junger states, “rates of depression and suicide tend to go up rather than down. Rather than buffering people from clinical depression, increased wealth in a society seems to foster it.” This is the case with each of the conditions listed above. The drivers of this dynamic are straightforward, Junger contends. While being more financially independent affords greater access to creature comforts, it also is accompanied by increased social isolation (which only intensified during the pandemic). More pointedly, when we’re trained to prioritize products over people, or grades over learning for that matter, we less readily share time and resources. The pursuit of security and well-being, including through educational attainment, becomes not just an individualistic and competitive enterprise but something to be bought and sold. Networks of communal support atrophy and ultimately are replaced by “a desperate cycle of work, financial obligation, and more work”—whether or not that work is intrinsically satisfying.

Second is the replacement within the modern state of the role of community in maintaining social cohesion with that of authority. Not long before civil war broke out in the US in the mid-nineteenth century, Louisiana physician Samuel Cartwright announced his discovery of *dрапетомания* and dysesthesia. The former is a disease that causes slaves to flee captivity, Cartwright declared. The latter causes them to pay insufficient attention to their work. These mark particularly egregious examples of pathologizing resistance and noncompliance and invalidating trauma, noted dynamics of structures of disablement. Yet, as Bruce Levine argues, the same logic is reflected in less pronounced forms in the ways that ADHD, ODD, and other “conduct disorders” are understood in children. Indeed, ADHD and ODD “are now the most common classification of children medicated with anti-psychotics, among the highest grossing classes of drugs in the United States today.” Like *dрапетомания*, the diagnosis of ODD follows from overt challenges to or rejections of authority. Like dysesthesia, the inattention and impulsiveness of those diagnosed with ADHD are routinely treated as forms of misconduct that reflect covert noncompliance.

Comparably, Levine continues, adults who buck demands specifically from difficult, even dictatorial, bosses and employers often report experiencing acute anxiety and persistent depression. They exhibit genuine anguish and fear that noncompliance will cause them to be financially harmed and/or socially stigmatized. Yet they also dread the lost sense of integrity that would accompany compliance. Anxiety, depression, and other such “mood disorders” are widely assumed to have genetic or biological roots, at least popularly. Levine holds, though, that the situation with bad bosses and employers is just one example of a straightforward stress reaction to difficult existential realities.

Perhaps the popular view of anxiety, depression, and the like continues to have currency not because it has scientific backing but because it serves existing political and financial interests for the inner turmoil associated with challenging authority to be recategorized as a sign of defective biochemistry. Levine notes that the graduate schools and medical schools that select and train mental health professionals themselves are dominated by curricula that privilege pathologizing resistance and noncompliance. More to the point, he asserts, words like illness, disease, and disorder typically indicate that our focus should be on individuals who need treatment and cure, “not on a troubled society in need of restructuring.”

What, then, if forms of behavior classified as conduct disorders and mood disorders are instead better characterized as commonsense reactions to troubling socioeconomic conditions? They aren’t maladies at all, Levine contends. They’re exactly how we should expect people to react when they’re denied:

1. **autonomy**—self-direction, experience of potency, and capacity and ability to self-govern;
2. **community**—strong bonds among small groups that provide for economic security and emotional satisfaction; and
3. **humanity**—the variety of ways of being human, the variety of satisfactions, and the variety of negative reactions to feeling controlled rather than understood.

Societies that are hostile to autonomy, community, and humanity perpetuate themselves via a specifiable form of institutionalization that proliferates “large, bland, standardized, hierarchical, bureaucratic, authoritarian, coercive, manipulative, expansionistic, and impersonal entities.” The modern university is a clear case in point, particularly when university functionaries privilege the identification of adverse responses to institutionalization as malingering or signs that students simply can’t cope.
That these responses are evidence instead of somatic rebellion against structural deformities, neuro-corporeal refusals fully to comply, is unfathomable.

PUTTING THE COMPULSION IN COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

Of course, my students don’t interpret their own experiences as somatic rebellion either. This isn’t a shortcoming, it’s a basic societal expectation. Drawing on Fanon’s work on the politics of psychiatry in colonized spaces, Murdock contends that structures of disablement are most visible and most deadly with respect to pathologizing Indigenous resistance to settler state violence and the outright erasure of historical trauma. Indigenous lands, bodies, and psyches are subject to systematic abuse and eradication that is explained away by colonizers—via doctrines of discovery, Manifest Destiny, or other comparable appeals to cultural superiority—or aggressively made to disappear from collective memory. Indigenous peoples who are unable to play along and pretend that the murder of their worlds never actually happened or somehow was for the best are depicted as constitutionally wounded, in need of “humanitarian management,” as Dian Million quips, or what amounts to “group death that poses as care.”

A similar, albeit far less murderous, dynamic is at work within the educational system of the United States. Prior to the Civil War, no social imperative existed specifically for compulsory schooling. Schools existed, but because the antebellum US was largely an agrarian society, most people expected to become farmers. If they got any formal education at all, it typically ended by age twelve. Higher education was strictly for male members of the social elite, particularly those interested in learning law or medicine, joining the clergy, or becoming men of letters.

Yet, industrial sectors of the economy expanded exponentially in the American North during the Civil War. Captains of industry gained a sufficiently firm political foothold to leverage public policy on behalf of their commercial interests. The fulfillment of these interests required the establishment of an entirely new social order, which “didn’t arise as a product of public debate,” John Taylor Gatto remarks, “but as a distillation of private discussion” among “Northeastern policy elites of business, government, and university life.” These discussions were driven by “the new logic of the Industrial Age,” according to which family and community life were to refocus from the farm to the factory. An exaltation of intensive productivity and “social efficiency” resulted from the seemingly limitless potential of coal-driven machinery. And bodies were needed to tend both these machines and the bodies that tended the machines.

Surely there were many communities that resisted compulsory schooling. But several factors may help to explain how it took firm hold relatively quickly in American society. Gatto asserts that public support for compulsory schooling was already strong in the North among middle-class and upper-class whites prior to the Civil War because of (i) the Red Scare of 1848 and growing fears of revolution among the urban poor and (ii) worries about of the cultural influence of Catholicism due to an influx of Celtic, Slavic, and Latin immigrants. Compulsory schooling was regarded as a principal means to mitigate both threats. Support for it in the South and North alike gained strength among whites of all classes after the Civil War as it served to control the mobility and economic opportunities of newly freed slaves. Wide national support as well for westward expansion bolstered the creation of Indian boarding schools, a cornerstone of the federal government’s commitment of genocide.

Compulsory schooling thus provided a means to indoctrinate and sort children within an increasingly diverse yet centralized and hierarchical economy. A generation hence, sociologist Benjamin Kidd defended the need to “impose on the young the ideal of subordination to the common aims of organized humanity” rather than to ethnic and religious identifications. Elwood Cubberly, future dean of education at Stanford, argued in his 1905 dissertation for Columbia Teachers College that schools should be viewed as factories designed expressly to disassemble a system in which children learn crafts associated with provincial living. Rather than completing school by age twelve, childhood was to be extended by two, four, or even six years to provide extra time for children to be sorted and then “shaped and formed into finished products [. . .] manufactured like nails.”

Frederick T. Gates, who, with John D. Rockefeller, funded the General Education Board, a philanthropic organization that supported the expansion of higher education, envisioned a society in which “people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands.” For this to occur, agrarian conventions and parochial traditions should be made to fade from our minds, and unharmed by tradition we work our own will upon a grateful and responsive folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, educators, poets, or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple [. . .]. [W]e will organize children [. . .] and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way.

William Torrey Harris, US Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906, lauded that “Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education, which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual.”

Far from creating an independent and informed populace, school curricula thus came to operate as a reverse elenchus, producing physical, moral, and intellectual paralysis on the part of students. Lesson by lesson, the vast majority of students continue to be taught to submit to authority
figures and obey orders, to embrace standardization and regimentation (including literally being formed into rows), to please (or at least not rile) their superiors, to be granted (or arbitrarily denied) privileges but no effective rights, to become accustomed to routine evaluation and judgment by strangers, to measure themselves by their class position, to regard emotional and intellectual supplication as normal, to spend hours doing tedious exercises, to sit quietly despite being bored stiff, and to believe that their failure at any of these enterprises represents an individual moral deficiency that may well compromise future success. “What better preparation for accepting unquestioningly the lives given us?” Gatto notes. “Where else can students ‘learn to think of themselves as employees competing for the favors of management?’”

And what of those students who refuse to comply? What about miscreants? They also must be managed. This is accomplished primarily by inducing fear of the inability to access just about the only pathway to occupations that aren’t pure drudgery. It’s incredible that in the US today nearly all such occupations are accessible pretty much solely by passing through a higher-education bottleneck that itself is treated as compulsory de facto if not de jure for occupational advancement. This displays just how successful the social engineering begun in the nineteenth century still is in the twenty-first. If fear fails, there’s always medication or routine punishment. And if these fail as well, the school-to-prison pipeline provides for-profit “correctional” corporations with bodies—mainly black and brown—for cheap and unpaid labor.

Schooling at all levels thus continues to succeed, marvelously, at doing what it was originally intended to do. Its purpose was never to educate in the typical sense of the term. It certainly wasn’t meant to prepare students in any concerted way to struggle against the current climatological-ecological crisis (which surely is part of Greta’s rationale for engaging in her extended school strike). Its purpose was, and still is, to break each student’s will as it funnels and controls the flow of bodies into a market economy. And most of us who’ve been subject to schooling are left with no salient or easily identifiable choice but to take our place in a lifeway that requires us to damage the planet, one another, and ourselves and, tragically, to be thankful for it.

This is the system in which I find myself. With respect to my teaching duties, I’m paid to be a glorified sorter. I may try to teach against the grain of the settler state, but I’m also complicit with it. Complicit under duress, I suppose, but still complicit. For whatever I may teach in class runs up against the demand, states Curtis White, that I also perform “the task of sorting human beings into categories useful to the state and to future employers: these are the A students, there the B, and those over there are the failures. Use them accordingly.”

Correspondingly, I’m a functionary of an absurdly expensive credentialing service the workings of which my students must spend their early lives figuring out to signify their qualification for professional advancement. And what a service it is, designed expressly to support the thinly veiled illusion that the socioeconomic institutions operative within the settler state are meritocratic. Indeed, I’ve been trained to accept that it’s part of my calling as a tenured professor to pretend that I myself am an example of the meritocracy at work.

Rubbish.

Yet here I am.

FROM INSTRUCTION TO INTERACTION

Today, nearly every student who enters my classroom spends a great deal of time working on assignments that call for a narrowly conceived, readily testable form of analytical intelligence. From the perspective of most of my colleagues, my university’s administrators, and my university’s accrediting institution, my courses should follow suit. I’m called on to play a calculable role in helping students learn to think critically, communicate effectively both orally and in writing, analyze and parse complex arguments, and so forth, all of which are to be dutifully outlined in my course learning outcomes on the syllabus.

These aren’t bad skills to have, mind you. They have pedagogical value. But within the current educational system they’re also representative of a “monochromatic flattening of education,” as James C. Scott puts it, that reduces philosophy itself to a series of threadbare mental exercises. This concerns me, but it’s probably the least of my concerns. I find the demand that I be a sorter far more troubling, which is why I began to distance myself from the practice a few years ago and gave it up entirely (save in graduate courses) during the academic year that ended with the pandemic.

The primary function of grading is to coerce students to do what they’d rather not. From a market perspective, grading also reinforces the importance of valuing external rewards over autonomy, humanity, and community. In the same vein, my students’ lives largely are governed by a productivity fetish. More often than I’d like to admit, so is mine. Work, work, work; stress, stress, stress; and feel guilty when you aren’t working and stressing about your work. Earn good grades, land the plum job, qualify for a better income, receive exemplary performance evaluations, acquire accolades, get the big promotion. Always look to improve, at least on paper.

Slowly but surely, we become our achievements. We’re a number on a transcript, a paycheck, and an annual review. We’re the pedigree of the institutions with which we’re affiliated. We’re a list of accomplishments on a resumé or vita. We are a what, not a who. And we’re well trained to judge ourselves and one another accordingly. Somehow, we never quite measure up. Happiness is always a slightly larger number, a slightly better affiliation, a slightly longer accomplishments list away.

What would it mean instead to be a teacher of veritable who—of sacred beings, as each of my students is? What would it mean to honor their sacredness? How do I honor my own in the process?” Seeking answers to these questions has led me to devote myself less to supporting students’ learning (as it were) than our shared unlearning...
of invidious educational habits and expectations. In the pursuit, we together stand to develop new and interesting forms of intelligence.

Indigenous pedagogies have proven invaluable for me in this enterprise, even if my positionality necessitates that I proceed with caution in working with them. More on my caution later. To begin, here’s Lee Hester:

Correction is an important part of Euro-American education. Almost everyone in academic life has as part of his or her job the grading of papers. It is central to the Euro-American tradition. It is almost completely alien to Choctaw tradition. This is in part because of the value of context [...] but also because of the value of respect [...]. 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. Though there may be many ways of rationalizing the need for correction, or how correction, properly understood, actually is a form of respect for the person being corrected, it is very difficult—maybe impossible—for it not to convey a feeling of superiority versus inferiority; a lack of respect for, if not downright disrespect for, the person being corrected.43

This claim is echoed over and over throughout the literature.

Lecturing and comparable forms of instruction, for example, play a central role in the typical American education. By comparison, asserts Shay Welch, myriad Native traditions favor engaging almost exclusively in forms of learning characterized by “choice making and skill development, an intense emphasis on individual initiative, and a proscription of direct guidance or correction by teachers and elders.”44 Children of all ages are left largely to their own devices, and discipline is rare. Even for the young adults Welch and I teach, “To immediately mark and correct a student’s paper is nothing more than to act as if you did not believe that the student was capable of coming to the right answer eventually on her own with appropriate guidance [...]; it is a denial of dignity and deemed rude, which is a serious transgression in Native interaction.”45

It isn’t that Indigenous pedagogies preclude guidance, Lorraine Brundige notes. It’s that guidance is typically indirect, and it’s never pushy.46 Nor are learners ever treated as inferiors. Keith Basso comments that among the Apache, stories are often designed to “work on you,” “get under your skin,” “make you want to change,” or “make you want to replace yourself” via moral transformation.47 Basso calls this practice “interventive-noninterference,” and it regularly involves telling tales that may not seem to have anything to do with whatever question the learner asks or the problem they present. The learner is hereby “given the autonomy, the complete freedom to discover the relevance of the reply.”48 The storyteller has intervened in the learner’s affairs, but only on request. Moreover, the storyteller doesn’t interfere with the learner’s capacity to work out on their own what lesson(s) to take away.

Am I able to engage in something like interventive-noninterference in the classroom? Being at present a relatively inexperienced unlearner of invidious educational habits and expectations, it would be foolhardy of me to believe I have the skillset—or mindset—seamlessly to pull it off. But I take the above considerations as a clear reminder that to be a teacher who centers Indigenous pedagogies is to be one kind of caretaker of sacred beings. To the extent that I’m able, it’s my responsibility to contribute to my students’ well-being on their own considered terms. I take this charge seriously.

These considerations also highlight for me the critical role effective classroom interaction can play in facilitating what Leanne Simpson calls intelligence as diversity.49 On the one hand, this entails creating space for students to practice disciplinary cross-pollination without me getting in the way. Budding climatologists, ecologists, community organizers, engineers, architects, and artists are free to exchange their knowledge and share their viewpoints with budding philosophers, interior designers, urban planners, and food justice activists. It means offering them all room to support one another’s diverse life paths, and, perhaps, to spark new connections and intriguing intellectual and relational variances.

On the other hand, I’m reminded to take great care not to center whiteness or replicate sexism, cisgendering, heteronormativity, and what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang point to as settler moves to innocence50 within the classroom. I’m also reminded to have the humility to recognize that, given my positionality, I’m likely sometimes unwittingly to fail. This makes essential creating space as well for minoritized students to be comfortable and confident to speak their truth. I’m fortunate, to say the least, that most of my students already expect as much from me.

**ECOLOGIES OF INTIMACY**

Another key pedagogical practice offers equally helpful direction. Recall that the main point of schooling is to learn behaviors, rather than (as is commonly believed) to gain knowledge and skills. Specifically, schooling involves learning to comply to the will of authority figures and to manage any resulting grievances largely on one’s own. Yet what if instead the behaviors learned have a freely embraced communal focus? I’ve come around to attending principally to what Jenny Davidson refers to as “self-care and the same management of responsibilities to the broader community,”51 notably including both the living community and the transient community we may build as a class.

Davidson makes that comment in an article entitled "Forget Distance Learning: Just Give Every Student an Automatic A." It’s a response to the acute stress both students and faculty faced trying to figure out how to transition to remote instruction during the early days of the pandemic. It seems even more relevant now.

Leanne Simpson remarks that what she calls ecologies of intimacy are highly prized among her people, the Michi Saagig Nishabeg, because they foster emergent systems of relationships in the absence of coercion, hierarchy, and
Not just young adults like those in my classroom but children, too, share the same rights as their elders. And while, like again their elders, they also bear responsibilities, they’re given the freedom and support to figure out for themselves where their responsibilities—and their gifts of wisdom—lie. For consent, caring, sharing, and individual self-determination are given pride of place. This has allowed the Michi Saagiig Nishaabeg to accumulate “networks of meaningful, deep, fluid, intimate collective and individual relationships of trust,” despite ongoing subjection to settler state violence.

**Trust:** It’s the first of the Four Pillars at the heart of each undergraduate course I teach. (They’re listed in place of learning outcomes on my syllabi.) My students don’t have to earn my trust. They have it by default. Instead, it’s my responsibility to earn theirs. **Respect:** My students’ needs, interests, and concerns matter. They deserve my attention. **Empathy:** Life at my home institution in expressly designed to be stressful for students. I refuse to ignore this. **Consent:** My students aren’t asked to do anything that isn’t subject to their prior agreement. We begin our work together by deciding not how my students will earn their grade. The A is theirs at the outset no matter what they choose to do. So we focus on how we can get the most out of our time together, and this can only be determined by collective involvement and decision-making.

The components of the Four Pillars aren’t unique to Indigenous pedagogies. Nor, in general terms, are core features of ecologies of intimacy. But Indigenous communities have uniquely rich histories of nurturing self-determination and anti-authoritarianism, particularly under the pressures applied by structures of disablement. Hierarchalism and the mechanisms of surveillance and control that are central to compulsory schooling are widely rejected. If I intend to do the same, I do well as a teacher to commit to earning my leadership position in the classroom rather than imposing it. Students thus learn up front that they don’t need to look to me for instructions. But our studies—typically centered on readings, films, and far-flung discussion—aren’t always the point. And they fail by the wayside at times, sometimes by design (with regular walks) and sometimes not (with ad hoc trips to a coffee shop or local park simply to decompress). Canine companions are always welcome with prior unanimous student approval, since they provide a welcome distraction.

By engaging in practices like these, students ease into the idea that it’s perfectly fine to get exactly as much out of the course as they wish, that they have my support with whatever they choose to do. A small handful of students just about every term prefer to get nothing from a course and do exactly that. Many enjoy keeping a journal (I offer substantive responses to every post). Some seek out intensive research collaborations with me and/or fellow students or undertake self-directed research projects or creative activities. Occasionally, one or two create their own learning rubrics and plans for self-assessment. And it’s now commonplace in my courses for students not just to keep up with the material we cover of their own accord but, completely unprompted, to highlight not just that they’ve learned (often because the pressure of the grade is absent) but what they’ve learned—making connections and drawing conclusions that are entirely their own.

This is satisfying work, which doesn’t mean it’s necessarily easy. For my students, it involves less prep (if they so choose) but more presence. For me, it requires a lot of both, particularly since I’m striving as best as I can to model ecologies of intimacy in the classroom.

Still, I have no doubt that you may be concerned about free riders in this setting. I must admit that I’m not. I have no interest in forcing my students to spend time doing something they have no desire to do. Call me crazy, but if a course is running smoothly and participants’ needs and interests are being met (to the extent possible), I’m satisfied. It’s my responsibility to make my classes worth my students’ time while accepting that they always have a litany of other demands in their lives to address.

Call my courses blow-offs if you like. Accuse me of being lazy, a grade inflater, lacking in rigor (a veritable heresy for a philosopher), or overly permissive. Frankly, I don’t care.

Okay, maybe I care a little. Still, I simply can’t envision a scenario in which I’ll ever assign a grade other than an A for my undergraduates again (except if a student expressly requests to be subject to a conventional rubric, which hasn’t happened yet). I readily acknowledge that I’m fortunate to have the protection of tenure. I’m also well aware that being a cishet white man offers me latitude that colleagues who aren’t so positioned don’t necessarily enjoy. And I’m certainly fortunate that I have at most about fifty students during any given term, which permits me to get to know many of them fairly well.

Not every course gels into a community, of course. Last term was a clear case in point. But when we do succeed, which happens much more often than not, we get something far more precious than the flattened version of analytical intelligence I’m supposed to focus on. We get what Simpson calls “intelligence as consensual engagement.” This is the mental and emotional acumen or astuteness that emerges only when people learn to learn from one another on their own terms and entirely for their own edification. At worst, students are given the space simply to get to know more about one another. At best, they get a glimpse, however brief, of what it’s like be full-fledged whos: “loving, creative, self-determining, interdependent, and self-regulating community-minded individuals.” Perhaps students even begin in small and subtle ways to metabolize and embody their sacredness—no matter how much credentialing, sorting, and other forms of authoritarian power continue to play leading roles in their schooling.

**PROCEEDING WITH CARE**

I hope it’s clear to you that I’m not offering advice or prescriptions. I’m describing some of my own teaching practices and the rationales behind them and simply inviting you to do with this information what you will. These practices are at least partially specific to the idiosyncrasies of my home institution, my courses, and my students’ interests and needs. I think they’re also flexible enough for you to investigate how guidance from Indigenous
pedagogies can serve your students if you’re inclined to do so.

I hope it’s also clear that I’m not dealing here in panaceas or miracle cures. As I noted above, alleviating my students’ suffering, however minimally and temporarily, may be the best I can do. But this is better than nothing.

Still, I offer a stern word of caution. It would be a grave mistake for me to treat ecologies of intimacy (or Indigenous pedagogies more generally) as contextless, at least as Simpson describes them. For her people, ecologies of intimacy are an embodiment of their homeland, Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogamig. Across Indigenous communities, they’re situated—literally—in places, performances, and stories specific to kinship networks marked not just by abiding more-than-human intergenerational relationships but also rich histories of relational accountability.

Moreover, ecologies of intimacy (and Indigenous pedagogies) are at the core of Simpson’s active pursuit of Indigenous cultural revitalization and political resurgence via the creation of “islands of decolonial love” in a turbulent sea of ongoing settler state violence. By comparison, I’m dealing principally with the palliation of stress conditions within loose and short-lived communities comprised largely of a kinless cohort. We kinless just aren’t that good at the sort of intimacy Simpson has in mind. Maybe not any sort. And rather than cultural revitalization and political resurgence, I can only disrupt, modestly at best, the most immediate structures of disablement my students face.

I wonder, though. Can acknowledging these limitations itself be enabling? Consider the fate of place. My students and I are inhabitants of traditional Lenni-Lenape land ceded under dubious circumstances. This fundamentally compromises our capacity for relational accountability with respect to our wider ecology. One can’t possibly relate well to a place that one’s cultural forbearers have pillaged, particularly when resilient parasitisms by colonizers remain firmly in place.

But maybe both embracing ecologies of intimacy and acknowledging the cultural—and structural—barriers to the capacity of my students for ecological intimacy offers them an important opportunity. Perhaps it can help crystalize not just what somatically they’re rebelling against but also what’s truly worth fighting for.

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NOTES

1. The Red Nation, The Red Deal, 8
3. Greta Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 75; emphasis added.
5. The disease in question must be something like Windigo (Anishinaabemowin)wétiko (Cree), a sickness of exploitation and insatiable greed that drives the afflicted to commit wanton acts of murder, brutality, and deceit (see J. D Forbes, Columbus and Other Cannibals, and Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass, 205ff.
6. My students also recognize that members of older generations who urge them to take this responsibility typically provide scant support in the process (see Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 138).
7. Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 15.
8. Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 56; see also Svend Brinkmann, Diagnostic Cultures.
10. Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 37.
11. Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 46.
12. Thunberg et al., Our House Is on Fire, 46.
14. Junger, Tribe, 19; see also Mushtaq, "Relationship between Loneliness, Psychiatric Disorders and Physical Health?" and Mann et al., "Loneliness and the Onset of New Mental Health Problems."
15. St. George and Strauss, "The Crisis of Student Mental Health."
16. Junger, Tribe, 17; see also Hari, Lost Connections.
17. Levine, Resisting Illegitimate Authority, 3.
20. Clarke, "Magazine Portrayal."
22. Levine, Commonsense Rebellion, 3. This distinction tracks that between the medical and social models of disability. Proponents of the former treat disability as a function of bodies that work incorrectly. Something is wrong with the disabled person that prevents them from being able to function in a given setting. Proponents of the latter regard disability instead as a function of social organization. Certain forms of embodiment are accommodated over others, which at least partially contributes to impairment among those who are denied accommodation (see Reynolds, “I’d Rather Be Dead than Disabled,” and Taylor, Beasts of Burden.
23. Levine, Commonsense Rebellion, 4.
33. Cited in Derrick Jensen, A Language Older than Words, 37. Gatto (The Underground History, xxviii) notes that the idea of adolescence came into being because of added years of compulsory schooling. The term was a denotation for individuals who had never before existed: persons who had reached puberty but who had not yet become adults.

34. Cited in Frederick Taylor Gates, The Country School of To-morrow, 6.


36. Gatto, Dumbing Us Down, 38; see also Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society, and Charles Eisenstein, The Ascent of Humanity, 319ff.


39. Why, then, in the US are schools at every level generally assumed to be representations of systematic failure (see James E. Côté and Anton L. Allahar, Ivory Tower Blues) and Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, Academically Adrift? Perhaps this is reflective of a similar sort of intentional forgetting among members of colonizer culture as that which has erased ready awareness of Indigenous genocide.


42. If (i) the earth is sacred or full of sacred places and phenomena and (ii) we humans belong here, then we do well to regard ourselves as sacred too. As are all living beings, we’re enmeshed in relationships that call for respect and responsibility. So contrary to popular belief among colonizers, humans aren’t inherently destructive. Evolutionarily, this can’t possibly be true. Such a notion also props up the benighted notion that ecocide and climate change are byproducts of human failures rather than the expected outcome of centuries of accumulating colonial injustices against Indigenous lands and lives.

43. Thurman Lee Hester, Jr., “Choctaw Conceptions of the Excellence of the Self, with Implications for Education,” 184–85.


46. Lorraine Brundige and Gregory Cajete suggest that the intergenerational transfer of sacred knowledge regarding tribal ceremonies often serves as an exception to proscriptions against intergenerational transfer of sacred knowledge regarding tribal ceremonies. See Lorraine F. Brundige, “‘Ungrateful Indian’: Continuity of Native Values,” 46, and Gregory Cajete, Look to the Mountain, 32f. I leave it to you to determine if there may be some corresponding necessities within your classroom.


49. Leanne B. Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 163.


52. Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 8.

53. Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 77.

54. I routinely complement my reliance on Indigenous pedagogies with healthy doses of content from Indigenous scholars, activists, and creators.

55. Other-than-canine visitors are also welcome. Only once, though, have we had one, when a neighborhood cat tagged along with me on my walk to class.

56. While I reject sorting outright, I’m well-aware that this may not be feasible for you. I thank Agnes Curry for pointing out to me that several grading strategies may be made compatible with creating course-based ecologies of intimacy. These include collaborative grading, mastery-based agreements, and student-centered self-grading based on agreed-upon criteria (see Blum, Ungrading).

57. Simpson attests that when one has gotten to the point at which a lesson has become so familiar that one essentially could teach it in their sleep, they become responsible for modeling that teaching in practice. I’m nowhere near that at present with respect to ecologies of intimacy, but I’m not planning to retire anytime soon. See Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 156.

58. Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 160; see also Ian MacPherson, “Encouraging Associative Intelligence: Co-operatives, Shared Learning and Responsible Citizenship,” and Linda M. Goulet and Keith N. Goulet, Teaching Each Other, 98ff.

59. Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 151.


61. Leanne B. Simpson, Islands of Decolonial Love. Ecologies of intimacy also operate within a considerably broader set of pedagogical principles than I here specify (see Cajete, Look to the Mountain and Jo Chrona, Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies, 115ff.

62. Brian Burkhat—who ably serves as a mouthpiece for Jisdu, the rabbit trickster—refers to the people of colonizer culture as “Kinless Conquerors.” Colonizers are trained to revel in “a Solitude that deceives itself as Dominating Power.” Yet, where there’s no kinship there can be “no human power that is not the imitation power of domination.” See Brian Burkhat, “On the Mysterious 1832 Cherokee Manuscript, or Jisdu Fixes John Locke’s Two Treatises of Civil Government,” 47.


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BOOK REVIEW

Revealing the Circle Hidden in Plain Sight: A Joint Review of Stephen M. Sachs et al. Honoring the Circle, in 4 Volumes, and LaDonna Harris, Stephen M. Sachs, and Barbra Morris et al., Re-Creating the Circle: The Renewal of American Indian Self-Determination


Reviewed by Dennis H. MacPherson, Tracy Shields, and J. Douglas Rabb

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

Stephen M. Sachs and his research team of scholars and activists, both Indigenous and allies, have produced four, no, five volumes revealing the incredible impact Native American Indian thought has had and continues to have on America and beyond. A similar, though unrelated, project was published in 2005 by the University of Toronto Press under the title Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture (second and final volume, 2011), and we are not reviewing the Canadian
volumes here, though we do make passing reference to them to enhance and expand upon our discussion of Honoring the Circle. The circle is, of course, “a Symbol of wholeness in Native American cultures.” Because of colonialism, this wholeness requires “continuous renewal in the life of the people.”1 Black Elk is quoted as famously commenting back in 1931 that “the Nation’s hoop is broken and scattered.”2 Sachs and company argue that “Today the hoop, or circle of many Native nations is in the process of rejuvenation.”3 In fact, they argue that the purpose of these books is to contribute to “returning American Indian nations to sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and harmony as full partners in American federalism and society.”4 They express the hope that their books “will be helpful in improving the condition of Indigenous people around the Earth and in bringing into being a better approach to development in general and improved ways of doing many things, for the benefit of all.”5

They attempt to justify their use of the term “American Indian” while acknowledging and respecting that “Indigenous people prefer to be referred to as members of their own nation.” However, “the question of which term is best to use to refer to Native people collectively in the United States does not have a simple answer.”6 Throughout all five books Sachs and his teams “sometimes use the official US government terms ‘American Indian and Alaska Native’ as the most general collective term (and either ‘Native’ or ‘Indian’ as the most geographically specific collective).”7 They actually “rotate among Native, Indian, and Indigenous when speaking intertribally.”8

They also express concern about the term “sovereignty.” However, “it cannot be avoided because of its wide use, particularly in Indian affairs.”9 The terms “self-determination” or “autonomy” might be more appropriate; however, “autonomy is not absolute but exists within an agreed-to set of relationships, traditionally often seen as involving respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution in order to keep everything in harmony and balance or, as the Dené say beauty.”10 They conclude: “As we consider that tribal governments are governments within the system of American federalism … this definition of sovereignty is appropriate.”11 American federalism and American democracy have deep Indigenous roots. The same can be said, and has been said, of the Canadian confederation, though Sachs and company do not say so. However, the Canadian book on Aboriginal influence, Hidden in Plain Sight, which we mentioned in passing, notes that anthropologist Leon Hatzan, who was adopted into the Bear Clan of the Cayuga Nation as Tsa-da-ga-hes, argues as follows in his 1925 study of the Six Nation Indians: “This—the Iroquois Confederacy—was a model upon which the British colonists based their provincial government, and it supplied the basic idea upon which rests the foundation of the present system of political government of the Great Southern Republic, also the constitution of the Canadian Provinces with the central power at Ottawa.”12 This, we suggest, strengthens the arguments in Honoring the Circle, not that they need strengthening. This is no longer controversial. This is no longer revisionist history. It is mainstream history and should be taught as such.

Sachs and his team also explore the Indigenous roots of American Pragmatism, drawing on Scott Pratt’s definitive book, Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy. We were somewhat surprised that we could find no reference in Honoring the Circle to Pratt’s early work on this topic, published under the title of “Native American Thought and the Origins of Pragmatism,” in Ayaangwaamizin: The International Journal of Indigenous Philosophy.13 We think it is significant that Pratt’s work on the Indigenous origin of pragmatism was published in an all-Native journal, American editor Lee Hester (Choctaw), Canadian editor Dennis McPherson (Ojibwa), a coauthor of this review essay. The term “Ayaangwaamizin” is Ojibwa and means to go carefully or to tread carefully, not for your own sake but for the sake of all our relations including other-than-human persons. We believe that Sachs and company are treading carefully in Honoring the Circle. However, their criteria for identifying Indigenous inspiration are rather broad, allowing for rather indirect influence. For example, there can be no doubt that nineteenth-century American philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was directly influenced. “Thoreau was immensely interested in Indians and their relation to the land and to nature.”14 Someone has counted 1,074 references to them in his collected Works.15 Turns out that “among many others who were influenced by Thoreau Mohandas Gandhi read [Thoreau’s] ‘Civil Disobedience’ in South Africa in 1906.”16 Gandhi even quoted Thoreau in refusing to be registered and fingerprinted, as all Asians were required to do by the South African government. Sachs and company proclaim: “Thus the whole nonviolent resistance movement has a major root in Thoreau’s work, from a ground fertilized by both American Indian and European traditions.”17 We find it somewhat amusing that a real Indian, Gandhi, is said to be influenced by American Indians through the writings of Thoreau. If associating American Indians with “the whole nonviolent resistance movement” helps to question the B Western movie stereotype of the warlike savage red man, then we can’t really object all that much.

There are, however, far better examples of indirect influence in Honoring the Circle. Indeed, the first two volumes should be used in senior high schools across Canada and the United States. The books are well laid out, even difficult to put down at times. Students, having read the first volume and graduating from high school will, at the very least, understand that deep complexities are at play when considering how American Indigenous worldviews, political structuring, and community inner workings have influenced Europe and North America for centuries. Both volumes offer a trail of historical markers, examined within the conditions of the times. The extensive nature of the influences of Native values on Europe and North America, although understood in historical circles, is not comprehended at a societal level. Colonials have a long history of taking what they want from Indians without giving credit in return, yet even this value of sharing fairly seems to have roots that can be traced to Native cultures. In this sense, both volumes are refreshing reads. A strong case is made that Indians are responsible for North America’s and Europe’s contemporary dependence on markers of our democratic societies. Certainly, pre-contact, Europe was deeply committed to a feudal system run by monarchies that
were deeply influenced by Christianity. Each connection is examined by the authors in both volumes to denote the probability of direct influence ranging from quite likely to fairly probable. Volume II continues to follow the intricate web of historical conditions that reveal influences of Indian values, traditions, deep respect for nature, and community, on colonial values and European philosophy as we know it today, especially when considering the works of John Locke. Volume II also takes a deep dive into influences on the women’s movement, philosophy, and the environmental movement to name a few.

From a First Nations perspective, we find Volumes III and IV somewhat less enticing in that few of the discussions are headed up by Indigenous authors. It is one thing to embrace Indigenous traditions on topics such as economics, politics, women, and the environment, but it is quite another to realize that Indigenous cultures around the world are suffering because of our yearning to take from Indians at every step without understanding the basic standard of respect: to give back every time we take. As we write this review, the United Nations summit on biodiversity, the COP 15 meetings, are just winding down. Colonials say that “Indigenous-led efforts are key to Canada’s conservation goals,” yet even as we acknowledge that “Indigenous-led conservation” is needed to achieve land conservation targets by 2030, we discover that no Indigenous people are invited to the table to vote on these matters. Instead, First Nations people can be found shaking their heads at colonial desires for Indigenous knowledge to now save the world. In fairness, the volumes do discuss the problem of appropriation. The general theme of all five Circle volumes seems to be that Native ways are often the better ways of doing things for the benefit of all. Do we honor them by acknowledging this? No, we honor them through particular concrete action in locality by ceasing to violate the Circle. In attempting to honor the Circle while ceasing to violate it, we conclude with the admonition: Ayaangwaamizin.

NOTES
1. La Donna Harris, Stephen M. Sachs, et al., Re-Creating the Circle, x.
2. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, x.
3. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, x
5. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, xiv
7. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, xii.
8. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, xii.
9. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, xii-xiii.
11. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, xiii.
13. Harris, Sachs, et al., Recreating the Circle, xiii.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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We welcome readers to the spring 2023 edition of the (newly named) APA Studies on Teaching Philosophy. In this issue, we are pleased to offer two articles and a review of a newly published book on Plato.

Our first article is entitled “Building Autonomy and Trust in the Introductory Classroom: Team Discussion and Analysis Assignments.” It is authored by Becky Vartabedian and Karen Adkins, both of Regis University. In this article, the authors offer an argument for introducing into the philosophy classroom an exercise that they term “team-based discussion,” a form of discussion that, they write, was first introduced into one of their classes in the fall of 2018 but now figures as an essential component of their introductory philosophy classroom every semester. (They also note that this feature has been used in both online and in-person classes.) Termed by the authors “Team Discussion and Analysis Assignment” (TDAA), the discussion that they describe in their article is of a form that is meant to accomplish the following: incentivize students’ engagement with, and building trust, with one another so as to help them develop both intellectual and critical engagement with those ideas. This will, the authors claim, enhance student participation in philosophical discussion and, ultimately, help students to become independent of their teachers in coming to their own philosophical conclusions. The ultimate goal is, thus, the promotion of students as autonomous learners, and the fostering in each individual student of a sense of intellectual community with his/her fellow classmates. (The authors, helpfully, note one of the difficulties inherent in using the form of discussion that they advocate in their paper, and they note a strategy that might work as a remedy for this difficulty.) Readers attracted to the project described by Vartabedian and Adkins are encouraged to report on their own attempts to institute the project within their classrooms and report back on their success (or otherwise) with it.

Our second article, entitled “Using Truth Table Rules as Tools: A Rule-Based Approach to Teaching Truth Tables in Introductory Logic Classes,” is authored by Andrew Piker of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. In his paper, Professor Piker sets out clearly defined rules that he gives his students for the construction of logical truth tables such that, following the rules, the students will be able easily to set up truth tables that represent not only simple statements (both positive and negative), but also compound statements, i.e., conjunctions, disjunctions, conditionals and biconditionals. Having done this, students are then given the rules for determining the validity of arguments, and will be able to assess whether, by looking at the truth values of both the premises and conclusion, the argument they have before them is valid or invalid. Professor Piker writes that, once introduced to the rules for constructing truth tables, his students show marked improvement both on the assigned exercises using sets of truth tables as well as on subsequent examinations of the material. We encourage readers who teach introductory logic to try using the rules that Professor Piker sets forth in this article to see if this helps their own students more easily assess the validity of arguments.

As before and, as always, we encourage readers of our publication to write of their experiences as teachers—regarding the preparation of their classes, the construction of examinations that they think best assess what their students have learned in their classes, the materials they have chosen for use in particular classes or, indeed, anything else that they think has worked to the advantage of their students and that might help other instructors of philosophy.

Additionally, we welcome and are happy to consider articles that respond to, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages. We also encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other materials (including technological innovations) that they think may be especially good for classroom use.

Though we usually list books and other materials that we have received from publishers for possible review in our BOOKS RECEIVED section, this particular section is absent from the present issue, but we hope to renew it in a forthcoming issue.

As always, readers are welcome to suggest material for review that they themselves have used and found useful in their own teaching. Since our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues, this should be borne in mind when writing reviews and/or articles for our publication and also when reviewing material for it.
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ARTICLES

Building Autonomy and Trust in the Introductory Classroom: Team Discussion and Analysis Assignments
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REGIS UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION
One of the reasons we were drawn to philosophy as undergraduates was the appeal of discussing complicated ideas with our classmates. As budget cuts to the liberal arts have made philosophy classes larger and often virtual, running effective discussion-based classes, particularly at the introductory level, has become commensurately more difficult. Recent models of how to incorporate discussion into courses include discussion-intensive pedagogy and “philosophical think-tanks.” In this article, we offer a different model for incorporating discussion more formally and purposefully into courses. This model—the Team Discussion and Analysis Assignment, or TDAA—is distinctive on account of its amplification of student autonomy in discussions and community-building activities in the introductory classroom.

Team-Based Discussion and Analysis (hereafter TDAA) began in 2018 in Vartabedian’s "Philosophical Explorations" course, our institution’s version of Introduction to Philosophy, and has been a feature of every subsequent semester through the present. Adkins adopted TDAA assignments in fall 2021. We have used this model successfully at the introductory level, in both in-person and online formats, and believe it could scale to upper-division courses in either format.

Vartabedian developed TDAA as a philosophical spin on team-based learning work implemented at our university, primarily by our colleagues in the School of Pharmacy. The TDAA framework affirms the paired emphasis team-based learning practices place on content acquisition and application. While content coverage is important in our—and most, we suspect—introductory philosophy courses, it is equally important for us that students appreciate and adopt what we see as core to the philosophical method: sustained and collegial engagement with diverse views. Oral discussion is well suited to this kind of engagement, but effective discussion and oral discussion are not necessarily concomitant. The general way in which discussion happens in open classes, which can range from twenty to two hundred students and can be in person or online, tends to result in just a few voices participating consistently, and very little back-and-forth exchange. We think effective discussion depends on parameters of trust; participants must spend enough time with just a few colleagues so that they have some knowledge of one another and confidence in being heard.

In what follows, we describe the framework in more detail, including structural considerations and group formation. We offer example TDAAs, explaining their construction, objectives, and real outcomes from student reports. We evaluate the TDAA’s success in circumventing a key challenge facing all small-group work: the “free-rider” problem, where individuals who under-contribute can do so without suffering a penalty. Finally, we describe the benefit of affirming student autonomy in discussion—that is, a key feature of TDAAs is their operation away from the formal environment of the classroom, in a location the students choose and apart from the expectant gaze of the instructor—autonomy that has demonstrated substantive transformations in student comprehension of course material and the development of an overall course community.

TDAA STRUCTURES AND FORMATION
The TDAA assignment is an adaptation of Team-Based Learning (TBL) strategies, which are widespread in our
university (a private, master’s-level university) and used primarily in our pharmacy school. For our colleagues in pharmacy, Team-Based Learning assignments function as a ‘flipped’ model, “freeing up class time for application activities in which students work in teams to solve the kinds of problems they will face in the future.” These application activities depend on the implementation of regular readiness assessments, which include short quizzes that serve as pre-test benchmarks over content that will be deployed in the team application activity; content acquisition is evaluated with both post-tests that follow the application activities, and peer evaluations that incentivize the fair distribution of effort. Our TDAA framework depends on the standard commitments of team-based learning: namely, small groups that stay together during the entire semester, the use of peer evaluations as a way of combating the free-rider problem (see below); and expressly devoting class sessions to team activities.

TDAA groups depend on permanent small groups that are themselves no larger than 20 percent of the overall class size. At our institution, these groups typically include between four and five students each. In our model, groups are self-selected (i.e., students choose their group members) and form in week three or four of the semester, following the close of our institution’s add/drop period. This timing allows both the course roster to settle and students to begin developing a sense of each other’s classroom presence. Before TDAA groups form, students in Vartabedian’s classes will have participated in one or more preliminary group discussion assignments in which discussion partners are not self-selected, providing some diversity in encounters with others. While the hope is, of course, that students select groups based on these encounters with others, we notice that groups tend to form around proximity (i.e., where students are sitting relative to whomever ends up in their team) or pre-established friendships in the class.

Indeed, though there are many ways to form groups inside a classroom, we have taken seriously the anecdotal and persistent concerns students bring to small group work and small group projects from other classes (and from our own experiences). Students frequently comment on the seemingly arbitrary composition of groups, the potential for workload to be poorly distributed among group members, and the resulting frustration around grade distribution. Self-selection may not avoid these worries entirely, but it can at least relieve the burden of arbitrariness that might undermine the project before it gets off the ground.

In these groups, students develop responses to discussion questions over a reading under study and are completed in one seventy-five-minute class session. On days when TDAA groups are scheduled, teams meet in a non-classroom location they’ve determined in advance—available coffee shops or cafeterias on campus, on the quad, or in a common area in the residence hall or library. The prompts for Vartabedian’s TDAA are available on our institution’s learning management system (WorldClass) beginning fifteen minutes before the start of class; student groups produce a single set of responses and submit that to a designated drop-box on the LMS by the end of the class session. (An example of Vartabedian’s prompts appears in the section below titled “TDAA Procedure.”) Adkins posts TDAA prompts two days before and asks students to show up for the TDAA with the reading or viewing completed but has a similarly tight timeline on submitting responses. Except for the fifteen-minute buffer prior to the start of class, teams do not have access to the prompts in advance. Teams are also encouraged to work through as much material as they can in the course session with an emphasis on quality over quantity—strong responses engage the text(s) under study in appropriate ways (contextualization, discussion, and citation are required) and demonstrate collaborative thinking or depth of understanding that may not have been available from individual focus or full-class discussion. Our courses have accommodated anywhere between four and six TDAA each semester.

John Capps cites discussion as “ideally suited to encouraging our students to think critically, to consider a variety of points of view, and to give reasons in support of their positions.” Capps further insists—rightly, we think—that class discussion is an opportunity to “model how philosophy is itself an ongoing discussion between different figures and positions.” Alexander Englert recommends small group discussions as “a means of learning to philosophize,” and as opportunities for students to practice autonomy and self-direction. We think models like Englert’s “think tank” and our own TDAA assignments provide useful alternatives for maximizing depth in small-group discussion. Most basically, both of us value TDAA for their ability to emphasize and generate student autonomy in discussions; the TDAA itself is a semester-long assignment that is both iterative and generative. As such, we think it supports a broader view of what it means to philosophize beyond the Socratic example: to think synthetically or creatively about the problems philosophy presents, and to think critically and with appropriate skepticism about what the world presents to us.

Secondarily, the TDAA model is adaptive to significantly different course objectives and organization styles. Vartabedian uses TDAA as a way of cultivating close reading and textual engagement in classes. Because so many students are encountering philosophical writing for the first time, providing a dedicated and consistent place for the text ensures that the students are reading the assigned text; encountering elements of scholarly texts like introductions, footnotes, and references; and learning the relevance of these elements for understanding the main text. The prompts provided in a close-reading-focused TDAA alert students to significant ideas in the text under study. The TDAA assignments point to portions of the texts that students will typically end up writing about in short papers. They’ve discussed these texts with peers, submitted responses, and received feedback on their responses to these identified signposts in the text. Each of these experiences supports the longer-term work of philosophical writing in the introductory course.

Adkins uses TDAA as a kind of bookend to thematic units in the class, and typically chooses applied problems within the themes for students to use as TDAA. As Michaelsen and Sweet suggest, successful group discussion assignments...
require students to make decisions, to interpret evidence, and to draw their own conclusions from the evidence they’ve collected. The value in the bookend is that students can explore the ways in which the language and approach of philosophical analysis is relevant in the kinds of dilemmas they will encounter in their lives, and student discussion over some of the cases became increasingly nuanced over the semester. In the next section, we offer two examples of TDAAs that follow these different organizational approaches.

**TDAA PROCEDURE**

**THE CLOSE READING APPROACH**

The Close Reading TDAA invites students to practice strategies that offer more context to the opening paragraphs of the *Apology* of Socrates, found in West and West’s Four Texts on Socrates. Students are directed to read portions of the editors’ and translators’ introduction, pertinent information in the *Euthyphro*, and Aristophanes’s popular portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*. The instructions for this first TDAA are as follows:

1. Please name the students in attendance and participating in your TDAA today.

2. In West and West’s text, read note 5 on page 41. What is the value of the information in this note for our reading and understanding the *Apology*?

3. Read together *Apology* 17a-18a. Explain the language and disposition Socrates says is appropriate to the setting. Do his accusers use this language and demonstrate this disposition? Why or why not?

4. Read *Apology* 18c to learn the earlier charges against Socrates. Then, turn to p. 29 of West and West (their Introduction) and read point 2. Then pick up the action on p. 119 and read from marginal 90 to marginal 125 (on p. 120). What do you think this widely performed and well-known play has to do with the earlier charges Socrates faced?

The instructions for this TDAA are purposely didactic, intended to spotlight places in West and West’s collection that offer greater context for understanding why Socrates is in such hot water. These questions invite students to develop an understanding based on their reading and shared discussion of pertinent texts, using their best assessments of the text as the basis for response.

The first task—West and West’s footnote on page 41—distinguishes a private case like the one Euthyphro brings to the court from the public indictment Meletus has entered against Socrates. Second, by reading the opening paragraphs of the *Apology*, students come to grips with Socrates’s place relative to the law court, to his accusers, and to Athens at large, thus setting up the exchange with Meletus to come later in the text. Finally, when students see the picture of Socrates in Aristophanes’s *The Clouds*, they get a sense of the broad cultural attitudes in circulation about Socrates; pointing to this satire invites students to think about its role in Socrates’s fate and the role culture plays in shaping attitudes about notorious figures in general. Though the answers that groups provide often share a core set of similarities, what and why questions offer opportunities for divergence that spur conversation about the text in the large group.

The information above is—and has been—the subject of a lecture in which the professor (Vartabedian, in this case) highlights important passages in the texts under study and provides students with an orientation to the text in advance of their group work. The didactic instructions carry some of this forward to the small group, but students working together in small groups start to see features of academic texts and writing—including introductions, reference material, and supplements—that shed light on the primary text. The didactic TDAA prompts—examples of which are provided above—require discussion and synthesis of material into responses representative of the group’s thinking, rather than responses offered by a single individual in relation to the instructor’s question during a lecture.

**THE BOOKEND**

This is the third of four TDAAs Adkins used, at the close of the unit on ethics. Students read and discuss Daniela Lamas’s op-ed titled “‘You’re Dying,’ I Told My Patient. I Wish I Hadn’t,” which appeared in the *New York Times* in 2021.12

- Your first prompt is this (Lamas’s) op-ed from the *New York Times* (Lamas 2021), where a doctor regrets being truthful to her patient. (If you really want to dig into this, here are the several interesting letters this op-ed provoked, “Tell the Truth to Dying Patients?” 2021). I think it’s fair to say that at least three and maybe all four of our major ethical theorists (Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Arendt) would say that withholding the truth is clearly morally wrong, but the doctor makes an interesting case for withholding the truth in this sort of case.14

- Before the TDAA, both read and think about this article (try to do it both sympathetically and critically, as far as you are able), but also think about a time where either you lied and do not regret it, or told the truth and felt like that was the wrong moral choice. Lies by omission (i.e., I stayed silent about something I knew happened or similar) count here. (You have to be comfortable enough talking to your TDAA partners about this lie, so either think of what details you are willing to share, or disguise enough details to make this shareable. [I will dub this “pedagogical dishonesty” and grant you Atheist and Philosophical Absolution for it].)

- Here’s the goal for this TDAA: for you, as a group, to dig into these complicated examples of lying and truth-telling and try to come up with your own practical rules or guidance for telling the truth (in other words, our ethicists give us formulas and arguments justifying them, which are great and instructive. But we may find that these formulas
and arguments sometimes rub up against real-world complications).

- In your notes, I will want to see the kinds of examples you wrestled with, the sorts of complications for truth-telling and lying they raised, and what kinds of guidance you were able to consider as a group. (And to be clear, if you are not able to articulate a single rule or guidance that your whole group agrees on, that is A-ok. But I'd like to hear the rules or guidance you considered, and where and why you disagreed about them.)

Because this TDAA occurred much later in the semester, where students seemed comfortable in small and large groups, Adkins designed this TDAA to get students talking about how to apply philosophical tools and dilemmas to their own lives. Adkins begins the introductory semester with a discussion exercise giving the students an ethical dilemma about truth and lying (with no establishing lecture or theory). While students are able on day one, in spontaneous groups, to generate diverse responses to the dilemma, and their reasoning, across the class, hit the sophistication. Students weighed the different obligations they had not asked students to examine their own lives for significant stress. This TDAA was a risk (previous TDAAs had not asked students to examine their own lives for philosophic material), but students rose to the challenge. Group write-ups reflected a range of real-life examples that professional standards can constrain ethical discernment in some workplaces. Students were particularly struck by the ways in which our gravest ethical choices are made “in the moment” and under significant stress. This TDAA was a risk (previous TDAAs had not asked students to examine their own lives for truth-telling and lying they raised, and what kinds of guidance you were able to consider as a group). One of the things the author of this op-ed did particularly well was illustrate the ways in which many of our gravest ethical choices are made “in the moment” and under significant stress. This TDAA was a risk (previous TDAAs had not asked students to examine their own lives for philosophic material), but students rose to the challenge. Group write-ups reflected a range of real-life examples that were substantive (e.g., a student who has no regrets about a lie about identity to family members) and reflected real wrestling with complexity.

Adkins always devotes part of the class session after students submit TDAAs to full-group discussion of the TDAA so that students can benefit from other groups’ ideas, and this discussion stood out for its complexity and sophistication. Students weighed the different obligations of honesty that come from isolated encounters with others as opposed to those in ongoing intimate relationships of trust. Students were particularly struck by the ways in which professional standards can constrain ethical discernment in some workplaces. Students were overwhelmingly empathetic to the doctor and discussed the kinds of institutional limitations on her ability to provide care (e.g., resource limitations in hospitals that overburden doctors with too many patients and too little time). In other words, they were fully grappling with the many and significant differences between ethics in abstraction and ethics in lived, complex, socially constrained settings. The discussion was collegial and complex.

EVALUATING TDAAS AND THE FREE-RIDER PROBLEM

Group work often gets a bad reputation in the academy because of free riders; group grades allow industrious students to pull the weight of the group, and free riders can under-contribute while suffering no penalty. This problem has two aspects: a technical, accounting problem (how does one account for disparate work in groups for a grade?), and a practical problem (what is the value of struggling through a group assignment in which a free rider is present?). Englert avoided this problem in part by not grading students’ output from think tanks; Capps uses detailed rubrics to assess both individual student contributions to discussion, and whole-class discussions. Providing the criteria by which students will evaluate one another at the outset of the TDAA assignment can minimize free riders, or at least make clear that free-ridership comes with a penalty. Our strategy distributes evaluation and makes it transparent.

Our colleagues in the pharmacy program integrate the results of pre- and post-group readiness assessments into their evaluations. We evaluate the write-ups students put together from their TDAA submissions, with posted criteria that make it clear our interest is in the quality of discussion rather than quantity. We are interested in hearing from groups about points of clarity or difference, and not simply receiving transcriptions.

Affirming the value of TDAAs beyond independent group exercises requires the re-integration of relevant insights into subsequent class sessions. Acknowledging specific insights from group submissions in the next session’s discussion or using activities that bring representatives from different teams together to compare responses are ways of inculcating responsibility for the team’s work in its members. For instance, Adkins reserved half of the class session immediately after TDAAs were submitted for TDAA debrief and discussion, which gave the full group a chance to compare notes on what they discussed and illustrated some of the variety in student discussion when it wasn’t being managed or directed by a professor. The first TDAA in Adkins’s class focused on “cancel culture” as an easy topic for students to engage with and used two op-eds (one affirming cancel culture as a danger to free speech, another disputing it) to open discussion. When students encountered excerpts from John Stuart Mill’s On Liberty later in the semester, several of them raised the earlier cancel culture discussion as the class thought about how to evaluate the difference between government restrictions on speech and social restrictions on speech and respond to restrictions based on this evaluation.

The close reading TDAAs are written such that these don’t penalize students for not doing the reading, but it doesn’t let those students entirely off the hook, either. They are still expected to engage with the text to some degree and also with their peers. Later in the semester, Vartabedian follows TDAAs with seminar discussion in which half of the team is required to participate; following the next TDAA, the other half of the team represents the group at the table. These discussions focus on questions from the TDAA assignment that might have generated different responses among teams and bring team responses to those
prompts into larger class discussion. For example, Hannah Arendt’s claims in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* concerning the role of polite European society in perpetuating the evils of the Nazi machine—discussed in a TDA—end up being the focus of the seminar discussion. The discussion typically works from each of the groups’ initial responses, but then generates connections to passivity and politeness in our contemporary culture, and especially in relation to the uptick of public expressions of anti-Semitism in 2022.

Crucially, we employ different strategies to give students voice to evaluate themselves and their colleagues at the end of the semester, and to make workload inequities transparent. We each post criteria for evaluation of TDAA participation (preparation, contribution to discussion, respect for colleagues, fair distribution of labor), and ask students to complete brief evaluations of themselves and every member of their group individually. These evaluations are averaged to provide the individual score on the TDAA. Vartabedian also explicitly solicits feedback on the criteria that includes praise (did one member go above and beyond?) and critique (did one member not follow through?) and forwards the feedback to students with team member names removed. When students evaluate a peer’s contribution at any other quantitative level than 3/3 (for example), they are required to offer qualitative justification of that score with the expressed understanding that this feedback will be returned to their colleague; when the feedback is repackaged and returned to the free-riding colleague, it is presented to the student as a strategy for developing competence in group assignments beyond the introductory classroom. In Vartabedian’s classes, students have two weeks (between the final TDAA assignment and the last day of classes) to complete a short online form with both the quantitative and qualitative evaluations; the feedback is forwarded to students after the two-week window is concluded. In Vartabedian’s case, the anonymized qualitative feedback provided to students stands as justification for why the free rider’s quantitative grade includes deductions.

Adkins addresses the accounting problem through an adaptation developed in past team-taught courses involving group work. She reserves a small portion of the semester grade assigned to TDAA for group evaluations. Students individually submit brief evaluations of their own and their colleagues’ contributions to the TDAA (following the criteria established in a posted rubric). Students know about this requirement from the beginning of the semester, and they know its purpose. Adkins reserves the right to make small adjustments to overall TDAA grades for individual participants based on these group evaluations. In almost twenty years of including this as part of group work, most groups have reported consistently and equitable labor and communication practices, but approximately one group each semester reveals the presence of a free rider. Three members of the group, for example, will describe specifically what three people did, and then say person #4 rarely showed, was late to contribute, or wasn’t prepared to engage. Person #4 typically writes an unspecific evaluation saying all work was distributed fairly. In Adkins’s approach, free-rider adjustments are not questioned or disputed, which owes to the fact that these adjustments are partial adjustments, and do not alone make the difference between passing and failing the course.

Both methods of evaluation allow the presence of the free rider to emerge; indeed, we think that is an important feature of the assignment. Part of how we understand the autonomy we are trying to cultivate in students is not so much independence of mind or critical thinking but self-efficacy, that is, students take responsibility for their own learning, individually and with others. This requires work at the outset (setting some expectations for group meeting and activity, which each of us includes in the syllabi and original prompts for group formation), and also trust in colleagues to follow through on commitments and engagement. In our experience, this trust is generally respected in student groups, but occasionally violated. What we think is important, in both of our approaches, is both the ability to make the social commitment of the groups transparent, and to give students the ability to recognize and mark when trust is violated. The fact that in seven semesters of using TDAA Vartabedian has never been asked to intervene in a group and that in over fifteen years of utilizing this group evaluation method Adkins has never received a single complaint about it suggests that giving students the efficacy to manage their group learning in its positive and negative varieties helps them drive their own learning in this regard. In sum, the free-rider problem is notoriously tricky, and we think that making it manifest, transparent in the classroom, and giving students strategies for mitigating it is a successful path of navigating it.17

**AUTONOMY AND PHILOSOPHICAL COMMUNITY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

The intervention TDAA offer accomplishes several goals pertinent to the overall task of “learning to philosophize.” On our general teaching evaluations, students are invited to offer qualitative feedback that describes aspects of the course that contributed to student learning (Q1), solicits recommendations for improving the course overall (Q2), and indicates the ways students would describe the course to peers (Q3).

In Vartabedian’s pilot semester of the TDA (fall 2018), seven of eighteen respondents explicitly mention the TDAA assignments or small group work in their Q1 responses:

“I really liked working with groups. I felt it was a great way to receive different ideas and perspectives. Everyone was able to express themselves and ask questions.” (FA18 Q1, response 3)

“I really liked the assignments that we had called TDAA. We were in a group almost every week discussing what we were learning in class. It made the class fun and I got some friends from it too. There is a lot of writing and reading, but I did learn a lot about life and things I don’t usually think of.” (FA18 Q1, response 1)

In the second semester that TDAAs were offered (spring 2019), five of nine respondents explicitly commend TDAA
as contributing to their learning. Again, from the Q1 responses:

“The mix of personal work as well as group discussion around each reading in the class allows for complete understanding of the concepts. I also really benefitted from the TDAAs because they allowed us to work through the ideas in the class ourselves and teach each other.” (SP19 Q1, response 3)

“The group discussions and the TDAAs helped tremendously. It really helped to clear up anything that was confusing to me and my classmates.” (SP19 Q1, response 4)

Adkins had a similar experience in her pilot offering. Nine of the fifteen students completing evaluations for her fall 2021 course explicitly praised TDAAs as a valuable learning experience. (No students criticized them.) One student observed that TDAAs helped them retain what was covered in class, two others praised them for helping their critical thinking skills and ability to apply philosophical debates to contemporary issues and problems, and several students praised TDAAs for helping them see multiple viewpoints on an issue.

We suggest, then, that TDAAs resolve at least two additional problems Alexander Englert identifies in his discussion of philosophical think tanks: a transfer problem and a lack of Other problem. The transfer problem, or the "lack of continuity problem,” follows from Englert’s observation that small group discussions are viewed as merely arbitrary exercises designed to interrupt a class proceeding as usual. Englert argues that a group arrangement that persists through the semester supports the prospect of "an ongoing conversation" among small group cohorts, “because the conversation has to continue or be revived.”

One of the key advantages for Englert is that, by staying the same throughout the semester, the groups developed “collective presence and group memory,” and discussion could be sustained and developed.19 Midway through the fall 2022 semester, Vartabedian’s courses provided feedback that—in addition to offering strategies to improve the TDA assignment—indicated the TDAAs’ success in supporting understanding of reading and course concepts. In a course organized for first-year students to provide reading support, 20 percent of students reported that the TDAAs accomplish a transfer of concepts from reading to small group discussion and then to the short writing assignments that form the spine of Vartabedian’s course, precisely because the students have established a level of trust with one another that lowers the stakes of sharing.

The lack of Other problem is defined by Englert as insufficient viewpoint diversity within small and spontaneously formed discussion groups. To combat it, he recommends the presence in small groups of at least one “person with whom one is not absolutely familiar and whose point of view is unexplored.” This is linked to Englert's emphasis on the Socratic ideal underpinning small group discussions, which invokes a commitment to a “tough line of questioning” that groups composed of friends could otherwise avoid.

Though we understand the pitfalls that Englert's efforts are intended to avoid, student feedback from TDAAs groups indicates their facilitation of multiple perspectives on a particular text and understanding of key concepts that builds from discussion in the small group. We suggest that the lack of Other problem can be solved in the small groups themselves, but also solved by an instructor’s careful prompting, ensuring the presence of questions or discussion points that invite the diverse thinking that discussion of philosophical problems benefit from. Instructors design prompts that explicitly ask for students, even in groups that lack Others, to think beyond their own perspective, and full-class discussions of TDAAs afterwards can bring forth the richness between group discussions. These tools invite synthetic thinking and the critical and skeptical assessments of ideas that are fundamental to philosophical inquiry.

The common themes in much of the feedback we receive concerning TDAAs are trust and autonomy: Englert (speaking for most of us, we suspect) says that part of the value of small group discussion comes from students’ ability to speak freely “in a low-pressure environment where the professor—as a proverbial Big Brother—is not watching.” However, small group discussion that takes place in class does involve some moderation and professorial policing, even if only in the form of passive surveillance. Between the two of us, we have nearly fifty years of college teaching experience at six different institutions, which also includes dozens of observations of colleagues for tenure and promotion. Invariably, once ad hoc groups are formed for discussion, professors periodically roam the room to listen in to groups working. We argue that the crucial autonomy move here isn’t simply small group discussion, but the crucial leap of faith that permits students to speak on their own terms and in cultivated communities of mutual concern.

The TDA demonstrates an undervalued but critical strategy for philosophical inquiry, and that’s inquiry done in community with others. The point of the TDA is not necessarily doing it right, but rather doing it together.

NOTES


2. We are not using autonomy in its most general philosophical sense; rather, we are interested in autonomy as it applies to the way students take responsibility for their own learning. This is more than simply completing individual assignments in a timely fashion; TDAAs require enough student commitment to organize and plan for a meeting, and enough commitment and engagement with one another to generate notes from a substantive 75-minute discussion. This requires both individual student responsibility, and sustained trust and communication with peer partners, all of which go well beyond normal expectations of student responsibility in the introductory classroom.


4. Larry Michaelsen, Neil Davidson, and Claire Howell Major, “Team-Based Learning Practices and Principles in Comparison with
Using Truth Table Rules as Tools: A Rule-Based Approach to Teaching Truth Tables in Introductory Logic Classes

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I have spent a number of years teaching introductory logic to students who, in most cases, take it in order to avoid taking a math class. Many of those students find the sections of the class devoted to symbolic logic, including the material on truth tables, especially challenging. In order to help them meet that challenge, I have recently developed an approach in which rules serve as tools for teaching and learning how to construct and use truth tables.

When I introduce truth tables in my classes, I begin with an explanation of what a truth table is and provide some examples. Then I begin preparing students to construct their own tables. First, I present the following set of rules that they can use to decide which columns to include in their tables:

### RULES FOR DECIDING WHICH COLUMNS TO INCLUDE IN A TABLE

When deciding which columns to include in a truth table, go through the rules below one by one, top to bottom—making sure to follow each rule that applies to that table.

Also, start creating columns on the far left side of the table, and then work left to right as you add each column.

**Include Columns for the Following:**

1. Each of the simple component statements (represented by capital letters) in the given statement or argument
2. Any negated simple component statements (represented by a tilde directly in front of a capital letter) in the given statement or argument
   - For example, any \( \neg A \) that occurs by itself, or as part of a more compound statement such as \( \neg A \& B \)
3. Any compound statements that are inside parentheses or brackets in the given statement or argument
   - For example, if you were given the statement \( \neg(G \lor S) \), you would need to include a column for \( G \lor S \)
4. When constructing a truth table for a single statement, include a column for the whole given statement

When constructing a truth table for a whole argument (to determine whether the argument is valid or invalid), include a column for each of the premises and a column for the conclusion.

I demonstrate with examples how to use the rules. Then (after explaining how to determine the number of rows to include in a given table) I introduce a second set of rules to guide the process of filling in the columns:

### RULES FOR FILLING IN COLUMNS

When filling in columns, start on the far left side of the table and work towards the right side of the table.
write F in a row only when the antecedent (what is in front of the arrow) is T and the consequent (what comes after the arrow) is F; write T in any other rows.

For example, in a column for the conditional statement E → H, write F only in a row in which there is a T in the E column and an F in the H column; otherwise write T.

8. When a biconditional statement is at the top of a column,

write T only when both components or sides of the biconditional have the same truth value; write F in any other rows.

• For example, in a column for the biconditional statement J ↔ C, write T only in a row in which there is a T in both the J column and the C column, and a row in which there is an F in both the J column and the C column; otherwise write F.

Once I have explained and demonstrated the use of the second set of rules, students practice working with both rule sets to construct truth tables for truth functional statements. Most of them get comfortable with using the rules fairly quickly (some need more time, but generally develop proficiency with a little more help or practice). Then we move on to the construction and use of truth tables to determine whether or not arguments are valid, and I add a final rule for making that determination:

**RULE FOR DETERMINING WHETHER AN ARGUMENT IS VALID OR INVALID**

If the truth table includes any rows in which the premises are T and the conclusion is F then the argument is invalid. If there is no row of that kind, then the argument is valid.

This rule-based approach might seem somewhat cumbersome, since it involves the use of quite a few rules, as well as writing out column headings for any truth-functional components of the given truth functions (rather than just writing columns of Ts and Fs under the logical operators of the given truth functions). I do let my students know that they are free to use a more streamlined process (such as writing columns of Ts and Fs under the logical operators) if they prefer to do so; and some of them do abbreviate the process. Many of my students, however, find the rule-based approach helpful—they often tell me that they do, and they do very well on their truth table exercise sets and test questions. In fact, they do significantly better than my students did before I introduced the rule-based method.

Another concern that might be raised about this method is that even though students who adopt it do learn to construct truth tables and use them to determine validity, they might do so in a mechanical or "paint by numbers" manner, merely following the rules without thoroughly understanding the process. In order to address that potential problem, I spend quite a bit of time explaining the rules, how and why they are used, and relevant concepts such as validity and the
The bottom-up approach, in the second of the two chapters, reveals the thoroughness with which Marshall has read Plato. He focuses on a number of puzzle cases in Socratic

BOOK REVIEW

Reading Plato’s Dialogues to Enhance Learning and Inquiry. Exploring Socrates’ Use of Protreptic for Student Engagement


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Two commonplaces about Plato have inspired whole traditions of interpretive theory. 1) The Platonic dialogues arouse the characters in them, and readers who engage with them, to further philosophical inquiry. Maybe no other writings perform this arousal as well. 2) The dialogues contain turns of argument, ambiguities, and contexts that license widely divergent readings. It can be hard to say for certain what (if anything) Plato means to assert in any given dialogue.

Some Plato scholars devote themselves to these observations and to the methodological consequences they might have. Others touch on the general features of the dialogues but address them alongside other topics (justice, being) found in the Platonic conversations. Many others still have grown tired of the discussion of interpretation. How to read Plato remains a vital issue, and no one denies his facility for turning non-philosophers toward higher reflection. But the proposals for how to proceed with the dialogues mostly fall into a now-familiar range of answers, from skepticism that anything is asserted in Plato’s works (this response dating back to one stage of the post-Platonic Academy in pre-Roman Greece) to some variety of hidden or encoded meanings. The landscape seems to have been mapped out.

This new book by Mason Marshall freshens and expands the discussion. Marshall sketches an original approach to the dialogues that one can imagine putting to work in both introductory and advanced courses. This is not to say that the book is meant to be read by students in those courses. But I recommend it to their instructors.

In fact, and before I go further with this discussion, let me make my endorsement of Marshall’s book clear. All book reviews contain moments of disagreement, or points at which the reviewers distance themselves from claims in the book being reviewed. So too here. But my qualifiers should not detract from my admiration for the book or my esteem for the spirit in which it is written.

Marshall seeks a “protreptic” reading of Plato: the Platonic dialogues as occasions and inspirations for a turn away from uncritical thought to philosophizing or self-examination. He does not make this a discussion of the ancient genre known as protreptic (5), but appropriates the word for his own purposes. Marshall urges the importance of reflection to life, above all to political life, on the grounds that a successful democracy must contain thoughtful citizens. And lest one’s eyes glaze over at the prospect of pedagogical homilies (“Think for yourself,” etc.), let me say that Marshall immediately plunges into discovering the specific mechanics of the protreptic effect in Plato. In the two chapters that comprise this book’s methodological core, its first two chapters, he shows how to read the dialogues, first “top-down” and then “bottom-up,” with an eye to discovering strategies for instigating self-examination. These chapters reflect long study, broad reading, and some of the closest, sharpest observations I have seen about the dialogues.

In the top-down approach, one watches Socrates engaging with an interlocutor like Euthyphro, and asks counterfactually whether this or that change in his approach would prove more conducive to the goal of leading the interlocutor toward self-examination.

The bottom-up approach, in the second of the two chapters, reveals the thoroughness with which Marshall has read Plato. He focuses on a number of puzzle cases in Socratic
cross-examinations, when Socrates explains a question in misleading terms, or distracts from the real issues at stake. Marshall argues that we can use those problematic moments to ask what protreptic effect they might have. Do they make it easier for an interlocutor to admit ignorance? Do they turn a reader away from the interlocutor's self-advertisement for wisdom? Regarding a passage in the Euthyphro, for instance, Marshall writes that Socrates “is more obscure here than the content of his questions requires him to be and that his obscurity . . . is a device he uses deliberately” (41). I savored this chapter.

The purpose of Marshall’s questioning is not to determine what Plato means to do in each scene of questioning, but to reflect on what means encourage philosophical thoughtfulness. For the protreptic effect of reading Plato introduces a centrifugal force opposing interpretation as that is commonly known. In connection with the puzzling passages in some dialogues, “your goal would be not to figure out what his strategies actually are . . . but just to think of tactics that are available to him” (45). If interpretations one way or other keep returning readers’ attention in toward Plato, protreptic reading turns the attention out to almost anyone else: whoever might take to self-examination.

It is not always clear whether one is reading Plato, when following Marshall’s lead, so as to be protreptic oneself with students or qua student to be protrepticized. “Your aim would be just to discover new ideas and to refine the ideas you already had about strategies Socrates might employ” (45). More plausibly the purpose of this book is to show instructors how to set their students reading Plato with a shrewd eye for how to get them spinning off on their own tangents.

The two chapters that follow Marshall’s elucidation of his method defend the protreptic reading on a theoretical level. In chapter 3, Marshall takes on the problem of whether Plato ought to be interpreted in a particular fashion, and what we can deduce from the dialogues about how he means to be read. As in the rest of the book, Marshall draws on an astonishing quantity of recent secondary literature in treating this topic. He has looked into the alternatives for reading Plato and knows how to keep them all in their place.

For instance, Marshall embarks on a long and adept discussion of the Republic’s proposed city as if to set aside the political theory of that dialogue as a worthy subject of inquiry. In his discussion of the philosopher-royals, Marshall treats them as one more feature of the city without (to my mind) giving enough attention to the possibility that they indicate what kind of coup will actually institute the new government. But to listeners at the Republic’s conversation, and to many of its original readers, the force of mentioning philosophers in power is the expectation that philosophers will seize power. And to a contemporary audience that hears the debate over a city’s practicality as the promise of violent takeover, being aroused to philosophize threatens to mean being aroused to political subversion. Platonic self-examination is not as open-ended as Marshall believes.

In general, I fear that Marshall’s idea of interpretive options takes too little notice of the way dialogues and other texts were read in Plato’s day. “How Plato expects his works to be read” becomes a question about Plato alone. But when scholars of the present become clearer about how readers of the past consumed and assessed a work, they can say more about what an author would expect or could have expected from readers. Even when setting aside an author’s expectations, one would do well to understand what those expectations reasonably could have been in the very different literary culture of classical Athens.

Chapter 4 defends the project of the book from another side. Marshall imagines objections from scholars of Plato who want to read and teach the dialogues, but not with the purpose of enhancing self-examination. So Marshall lists all the motivations one might give for reading Plato, and pushes back against either the possibility of them or their desirability. I found this the least appealing part of the book by far. Marshall’s arguments do often hit home. He knows the subject and the scholarship. Nevertheless, the chapter creates an impression of dyspeptic dissatisfaction with scholarship. And even if these arguments carry the day, they would probably not leave the protreptic approach in place as the only game in town. The greatest danger is that the protreptic baby will be thrown out together with the scholarly bathwater.

Anyway, all Marshall really needs here for his book’s argument is the recognition that his use of Plato can thrive in the classroom alongside others. For that purpose he can do without chapter 4 entirely.

I had a different kind of lingering worry about the outcome that Marshall puts forward as the goal of such readings: self-examination, a thoughtful citizenry. No sane person could object to such aims. But it already gives a particular form to Marshall’s approach. First of all—he admits this point, even celebrates it—the thinking to be done under Plato’s influence does not have to be Platonic philosophizing, and probably will not be. As I said, Marshall does not propose an interpretation “of Plato” as one ordinarily uses such words. Any awareness of one’s own ignorance and effort to replace ignorance with knowledge will count as the activity to carry on because of the dialogues.

To advocate philosophizing that goes beyond Platonic thinking is one thing (and in my opinion a wise use of the dialogues). To equate all philosophizing with good thinking in general overlooks too much. Often, philosophy does indeed present itself as nothing but logical reasoning made self-aware. That idea of philosophizing undercuts the difference between philosophy and science; worse, it presumes that philosophy lacks all distinctive characteristics—what we may call “metaphysics,” what Wittgenstein criticized as a picture that “held us captive.” To my mind, Plato offers a superb introduction to ontological thinking of a broadly aprioristic variety. And advancing into metaphysics under his provocation probably does motivate a student to think with clarity and rigor. But clear and rigorous thinking need not be metaphysical. Some recognition of one’s own ignorance leads to scientific studies; sometimes the effect is psychoanalytical insight.
about one’s own motives. Many philosophers would not call either of those philosophical.

Scholarly, rigorously argued, richly informed, and erudite, yet also inventive, even quirky, this book ought to interest anyone who likes to teach with Plato. If they do not adopt all of the author’s prescriptions and purposes, they will still take up some of the strategies and special cases and liven up their classes with them. I intend to do at least that, thanks to Marshall’s influence and with his guidance.

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