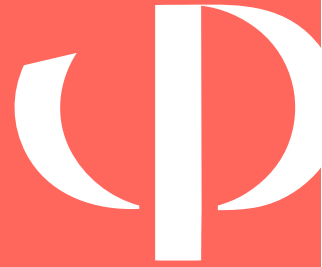


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ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES

FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY

NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

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APA STUDIES ON

Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies

A. MINH NGUYEN, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITORS

The Many Faces of Cosmopolitanism

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The essays in this issue were presented at a session on the theme of “Cosmopolitanism East and West” at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the APA Eastern Division. Let us first say something about the timeliness of the theme and how the essays in this issue respond to that timeliness. The most recent resurgence of the concept of cosmopolitanism has come via Confucianism. Confucian political thinkers across a number of disciplines have articulated and defended a form of cosmopolitanism based on the classical Confucian concept of *tian xia* (天下).¹ This new Confucian cosmopolitanism aims to ground a global world order that, unlike the existing (Western-centric) order, does not rest on national self-interest or international competition.² While some of the essays in this issue (primarily Tim Connolly’s and, to a lesser extent, Yarran Hominh’s) respond to the new Confucian cosmopolitanism, one of the concerns of this issue is to expand and to complicate this emerging dialectic between the hegemonic “Western” (read: European) cosmopolitanism and its challenger for hegemony in “Eastern” (read: Confucian) cosmopolitanism.³

This issue looks, then, to global philosophical traditions as new sources for developing and enriching cosmopolitan themes and ideals, as well as resources for challenging them and responding to those challenges. Cosmopolitanism comes, as Nalini Bhushan notes in her contribution to this issue, in an increasing number of forms. One traditional distinction is that between moral and political cosmopolitanism. The former treats cosmopolitanism as a moral ideal, a way of relating to oneself and to others. The latter construes cosmopolitanism as a way of structuring a global political order, both normatively and institutionally.

While the two are of course not entirely separable, the essays in this issue are largely concerned with cosmopolitanism in the moral sense. The cosmopolitan promise, in this moral sense, is of a world interconnected, if not unified, in and by certain forms of relationship such as cooperation, interdependence, and shared responsibility.

Cosmopolitanism, understood in this way, marks a recognition of the interconnection not only between distinct selves, communities, and societies but also across and between different ontological levels or domains. It marks a concern with the place of something (oneself, one’s family, one’s community, one’s nation, one’s state) in spaces larger than that thing (the world, the cosmos). In that way, discourse on cosmopolitanism indexes familiar anxieties about identity, similarity, difference, order, and chaos. If, as Sheldon S. Wolin observes, the task of Western political thought (essentially, Western political philosophy and political theory) has been to “fashion a political cosmos out of political chaos,”⁴ the term “cosmopolitanism” indicates both that impulse and its contrary. That is, it denotes both the desire to turn “political chaos” into “a political cosmos”—which, we might be concerned, amounts to “domesticating something wild,” in Stephen C. Walker’s words in this issue—and the discovery that what seems to be one’s home is in actuality quite foreign or alien.

Cosmopolitanism in this issue is a locus for the working through of a number of fundamental philosophical tensions: self and other, part and whole, identity and difference. Nalini Bhushan, in her “Capacious Cosmopolitanism: The Very Idea,” turns to W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) and M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948) as exemplars of a cosmopolitanism concerned with the creative expansion of forms of perception and perspective-taking. For Bhushan, Du Bois uses aesthetics as a way of building solidarity among the darker peoples of the world, long oppressed by Western colonialism and imperialism. And Gandhi, through his own ethics of exemplarity and asceticism, shows how the body can be a site of public discourse and contestation in service of justice and humanity. Bhushan’s analysis of these two figures sets the stage for her response to Martha C. Nussbaum’s recent turn away from cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum argues that cosmopolitanism is “human, all-too-human.”⁵ Wedded to speciesism, it cannot cross the species divide to include non-human animals in the moral kingdom.⁶ Bhushan maintains, however, that attending to the perceptual and capacity-forming (“capacious”) aspects of cosmopolitanism rekindles the hope of all-inclusive justice. The perceptual and embodied sense of justice that Bhushan argues is at the core of a truly capacious cosmopolitanism might be able to do justice not only to familiar human others but also to unfamiliar ones and to the rest of the animal kingdom.

In his “When Fazang Meets Cosmopolitanism,” Nalei Chen offers a reading of the Huayan Buddhist patriarch Fazang (643–712). According to Chen’s interpretation, Fazang provides resources for a moderate form of cosmopolitanism

that is capable of addressing some of the ethical dilemmas faced by cosmopolitanism. Chen argues that Fazang's metaphysics of interdependence, exemplified in the metaphor of Indra's Net, is tied to a universalist virtue ethics of honesty, gentleness, compassion, and generosity that, properly worked through, might be able to resolve the age-old tension in Western cosmopolitanism between special relationship-based obligations and general universal obligations. For Chen, Fazang has something to contribute to how we navigate this ethical dilemma precisely in virtue of his metaphysics. Once we come to see, whether by philosophical insight or through Buddhist soteriological practices, that everything (and, Chen emphasizes, "everything" is not limited to "every human being") is interconnected, interpenetrated, and interdependent, the difficulties of recognizing our shared humanity and responsibilities pale by comparison.

One issue that Chen addresses in his essay is the position of Fazang (as an early Chinese Buddhist) with respect to the Confucian tradition. Chen argues that Fazang has resources to bridge the universalism of the Buddhist tradition with the concentric circles of care and concern central to Confucianism—one manifestation of a more general tension between universality and particularity raised by cosmopolitanism.

Tim Connolly's essay, "Making Sense of Confucian Cosmopolitanism," takes on directly the question of how Confucian cosmopolitanism can balance special obligations to those closer and dearer to us with universal obligations arising from our common humanity. As Connolly points out, some contemporary scholars argue that Confucian ethics is, first and foremost, a role ethics: one's moral obligations arise from one's social roles. But roles are particular. So how is universality to be brought in? Drawing on work by previous scholars, Connolly examines three possible roles that might ground the kind of care and concern for outsiders that, he argues, is constitutive of cosmopolitanism even in its moderate forms: host, guest, and friend. He argues that these roles "can perhaps guide some of our interactions with those outside of our group, but they fall short of providing a model for how we are to engage with others simply by virtue of our being fellow citizens of the world." Such roles thus fall short of providing a model for how we are to exercise the cosmopolitan kind of care and concern for others, one that genuinely contributes to their well-being, simply by virtue of our being cosmopolitans. (A similar problematic arises, Connolly suggests in passing, even if one adopts a virtue-ethical rather than a role-ethical interpretation of Confucianism, since the way in which one cultivates one's virtues is through one's roles.) So, for Connolly, the tension between special obligations and universal obligations is re-established.

The first three essays in this issue begin with cosmopolitanism as some kind of moral ideal, one that can and should be adopted voluntarily as a guide to conduct. But cosmopolitanism also has a descriptive aspect. It describes a situation in which some people find themselves. Moreover, as Yarran Hominh argues in his "The Radical Possibilities of Forced Cosmopolitanism," it is a position into which some people are forced and of which they must make the

best they can. Hominh takes up one question raised by this recognition: how might those who identify as Asian American philosophers (a small but increasing number) approach the classical Asian philosophical traditions? To be racialized as Asian American, Hominh contends, is to be in a position of forced cosmopolitanism: thrown into and bound up in a world shaped by American imperialism where one has no "home," no place of unproblematic local attachment. One may consciously adopt this racialized position as a political identity ("making the best one can"). And one may philosophize on the basis of that political identity as a way of making the best one can. To this end, one might turn to the classical Asian philosophical traditions as a means of finding some kind of "home." But turning to those traditions is not necessarily conducive to finding a home, being home, or being at home, given their imbrication with various forms of domination and oppression. Hominh suggests that one response might be to approach these traditions in the mode of creolization. "Creolization," as defined in his contribution to this issue, "is a recontextualist interpretive methodology that draws together and mutually transforms traditions that coexist in conditions of rupture, antagonism, and unequal power relations for the purposes of addressing the problems people currently face."⁷ Deploying this methodology, Hominh submits, one is poised to see the content of the classical Asian philosophies as material from which to build a (philosophical) home.

Stephen C. Walker, in his "Cavernous Cosmopolitanism: On Getting Lost When Most at Home," concludes this issue with some reflections on and responses to the other essays in the issue. Walker's essay title and his elaboration of it render explicit one of the central, but largely implicit, themes of this issue: how cosmopolitanism is as much focused on the self as it is on the world or the polis that ostensibly forms its subject matter. Walker focuses on the ways in which the essays in the issue bring in, at least in a background sense, different conceptions of the self: the self as a theoretical legislator, as determining or clarifying obligations for all in the world; the self as an empathic perceiver of others, one that transforms itself through that perception, with the self-discipline, self-reflection, and openness to diverse perspectives and experiences that self-transformation requires; the self as an existential entity thrown into the world and bound up in the world unhomey. For Walker, what the essays in this issue bring out is the mirroring of those two features of cosmopolitanism: the self and the world. And what intrigues him is the way in which talking (or writing or thinking) about cosmopolitanism (presumably about the world) reveals far more about the self than we might think. As one goes outward, so too one goes inward. To borrow some Heideggerian parlance, "self and world belong together in the single entity."⁸ Finally, Walker's essay reflects on some larger methodological issues in comparative philosophy raised by these essays: how one should understand the fundamental normative building blocks of different traditions; the degree to which one can separate out the moral or the political from the metaphysical, the theological, or the soteriological; the attitudes and goals that one brings to one's philosophizing.

Taken as a whole, this issue contributes to an enlarging of the sphere of cosmopolitanism. On one level, cosmopolitanism is a theory or framework, one among others, for grappling with a troubled and uncertain world. On that level, it is rightly compared with and contrasted to others, its intellectual histories elucidated, its normative commitments articulated. On a deeper level, however, cosmopolitanism is a lens for thinking and feeling through what it is like to be in that world. And that project of self-understanding, of self-transformation, is one that is all-too-timely and much needed. Given the complexity and interconnectedness of global problems, from poverty and displacement to environmental degradation and climate change, we ought to approach that project with a latitude of thought that encompasses a wide range of philosophical resources and traditions.

DEDICATION

We dedicate this issue to the memory of Dr. Ronald Joseph Messerich (October 8, 1948–April 14, 2025).⁹ Celebrated for his teaching and mentorship, Dr. Messerich left a lasting impact on generations of philosophy and honors students during his 34-year tenure at Eastern Kentucky University, to which he devoted nearly his entire professional life. We had invited Dr. Messerich to collaborate with us on this issue because of his extensive knowledge of Appiah and Nussbaum on cosmopolitanism. Due to several factors including his deteriorating health, Dr. Messerich had to decline our “delightful invitation,” though he added he would “eagerly watch for the publication of the issue.” As a colleague, supervisor, neighbor, and friend, Dr. Messerich never disappointed. He always found ways to support, encourage, and uplift us. Thank you, Ron, and rest in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Nalini Bhushan, Nalei Chen, Tim Connolly, Nhi Huynh, Vivian Nguyen, Brent Robbins, and Stephen C. Walker for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this introduction. Vivian and Brent are currently serving as our editorial assistants and we are grateful for their outstanding contributions to the editing of this issue. Brent’s work is underwritten by the Department of Communication and Philosophy and the College of Arts and Sciences at Florida Gulf Coast University, from which he graduated as an Honors Scholar in May 2023, and we would like to thank the Department and the College—especially their respective leaders, Kevin Aho and Clay Motley—for their generous support. Lastly, tremendous thanks to Erin Shepherd, APA Communications and Publications Coordinator, for her extraordinary patience and understanding during the preparation of this issue.¹⁰

NOTES

1. For recent overviews of this increasingly vast literature, see Tang Yun, “The State of the Field Report X: Contemporary Chinese Studies of *Tianxia* (All-Under-Heaven),” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2023): 473–90; Xunwu Chen, “Confucianism and Cosmopolitanism,” *Asian Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2020): 40–56. See also Shuchen Xiang, *Chinese Cosmopolitanism: The History and Philosophy of an Idea* (Princeton University Press, 2023) and Tongdong Bai, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case* (Princeton University Press, 2020), especially ch. 7, “Tian Xia: A Confucian Model of National Identity and International Relations.” For one comparative analysis and overview in the International Relations (IR) literature, see Yudan Chen, “Two Roads to a World Community: Comparing Stoic and Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 2 (2016): 322–35.
2. For a critical take on this aim in the International Relations literature, see Sinan Chu, “Whither Chinese IR? The Sinocentric Subject and the Paradox of *Tianxia*-ism,” *International Theory* 14, no. 1 (2022): 57–87.
3. Cf. Chu, “Whither Chinese IR?”
4. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded edition (Princeton University Press, 2016), 9.

5. The phrase is borrowed from the title of Friedrich Nietzsche’s book of aphorisms, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, ed. and trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
6. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Harvard University Press, 2019); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility* (Simon and Schuster, 2022).
7. For more on creolization as an interpretive methodology, see Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon* (Fordham University Press, 2014); Yarran Hominh and A. Minh Nguyen, “Cosmopolitanism, Creolization, and Non-Exceptionalist Buddhist Modernisms: On Evan Thompson’s *Why I Am Not a Buddhist*,” *Comparative Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2022): 139–59.
8. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indiana University Press, 1982), 297.
9. Obituary of Ronald Joseph Messerich, Legacy.com, April 25, 2025, accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/ronald-messerich-obituary?id=58241191>.
10. This issue marks the end of our six-year tenure (2019–2025) as editors of *APA Studies on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* (formerly *The APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies*). Many thanks to everyone involved for their hard work and collaboration. In addition to making our tenure most enjoyable and rewarding, your individual and collective efforts have helped us achieve our goals and create a positive impact. We extend our sincere gratitude to all our contributors (too many to name here but we appreciate you all); our guest editors (Douglas Allen, Kisor K. Chakrabarti, Dien Ho); experts from around the world whom we consulted (too many to name here but we appreciate you all); our editorial assistants (Vivian Nguyen, Brent Robbins, Caylee Weintraub); the Department of Communication and Philosophy, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Honors College at Florida Gulf Coast University (especially Kevin Aho and Clay Motley); the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies (especially committee members who served as contributors, guest editors, or reviewers); and APA Publications and Communications (especially the indefatigable coordinator of this office, Erin Shepherd). Finally, we would like to thank our families—Anna and Kai and Nhi and Cynthia and Vivian—for their constant support and encouragement.

During our tenure, we have created the following special topical issues:

1. Volume 20, Issue 1 (2020): What Is It Like to Be a Philosopher of Asian Descent?
2. Volume 20, Issue 2 (2021): Buddhist Philosophy
3. Volume 21, Issues 1–2 (2021–2022): Japanese Aesthetics
4. Volume 22, Issue 1 (2022): The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi
5. Volume 22, Issue 2 (2023): Korean Philosophy
6. Volume 23, Issue 1 (2023): Identity and Solidarity
7. Volume 23, Issue 2 (2024): The Emergence of Analytic Philosophy in East Asia
8. Volume 24, Issue 1 (2024): Induction in Eastern and Western Philosophies
9. Volume 24, Issue 2 (2025): Cosmopolitanism East and West

The contents of each of these issues are themselves a contribution to building the kind of philosophical and cosmopolitan conversation that we advocate. Building this sort of conversation has been one of our aims since the beginning. As our editorial odyssey draws to a close, it is time for a final accounting. It is fitting, therefore, that our last issue focuses on cosmopolitanism, the guiding principle with which we worked on these issues and which structures our approach to philosophical conversation.

ARTICLES

Capacious Cosmopolitanism: The Very Idea

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ABSTRACT

The cosmopolitan idea has thus far been proven to be remarkably resilient for those who consider one’s *human* identity more foundational than one’s other more individual, religious, ethnic, gender, social, national, political, and communal identities. Recently, many adjectival versions of cosmopolitanism in the literature provide nuance and needed correctives to European versions from the Enlightenment going even further back to the Roman and Greek Stoics. These versions provide opportunities for the inclusion of the voices of hitherto marginalized people in the cosmopolitan public sphere while resisting the temptations of communitarianism. In this essay, I first reconstruct two such instances of adjectival cosmopolitanism: the *transnational* cosmopolitanisms of W. E. B. Du Bois and M. K. Gandhi. I argue that the work and life of these two individuals transform our understanding of the value of their projects as not simply parochial but as cosmopolitan. I then go on to defend a different cosmopolitanism, one that is even more inclusive than the ones we have hitherto seen in the literature. It focuses on our human ability to anthropomorphize, a remarkable human ability that has been vastly underrated by philosophers. This ability, if it were to be embraced by cosmopolitan thinkers, would revolutionize the very idea of cosmopolitanism. For this deeply human ability—far from being the crass and unreflective human response considered by many thinkers—allows us the uniquely human freedom to distance ourselves from our own immediate and concrete human needs and desires. It makes it possible for human beings to empathize with and to learn about and from our typically distant non-human fellow creatures and in this way to expand the boundaries of cosmopolitan consciousness and our perspective on what it means to be human.

Anything hinged at the center suggests legs. . . . We don’t *impose* an anthropomorphism. . . . We are unable to resist it. These are performances *demand*ed by an object.¹

INTRODUCTION

I’ve been struck, over the years, by the varieties of cosmopolitanism one finds in the philosophical literature. Consider just a few recent variations: *vernacular* cosmopolitanism, *colored* cosmopolitanism (Slate); cosmopolitan *traditionalism* (Carey-Webb); *immersive* cosmopolitanism, *extreme* cosmopolitanism, *moderate* cosmopolitanism (Ganeri); *partial* cosmopolitanism, *rooted* cosmopolitanism (Appiah); *liberal* cosmopolitanism, *national* cosmopolitanism (Tan); *transnational* cosmopolitanism, *radical* cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitanism *from below* (Valdez); *forced* cosmopolitanism (Hominh); and even

James Mill’s *paternalistic* cosmopolitanism (Bhushan).² On the one hand, one is impressed by the versatility of the concept. On the other hand, its mind-boggling versatility—our remarkable ability to creatively refashion and repurpose the concept of cosmopolitanism, depending upon context—might make us suspicious of its value for philosophy. Is there a core concept here of which each of these varieties of cosmopolitanism is an instance?

In the West, we can trace the philosophical lineage of the term back to Diogenes and to Immanuel Kant. According to the Greeks, an individual’s most fundamental attachment is to the cosmos; one is first and foremost a citizen of the world, not of a particular local community. Kant urges us to value human beings above all sentient others and argues that the basis of human solidarity is reason. He urges that hospitality is a human right, and not simply an imperfect duty emerging from philanthropy. The classical Greeks and the modern Kant, for different reasons, thus agree that each human being belongs to a larger world than the local one into which they happen to be born and in which they might initially feel at home. For this reason, we are primarily responsible to laws of universal scope, and only secondarily to the conventions of our local communities. This philosophical view is not unique to the West. Many have argued for the existence of parallel lineages of the universalist cosmopolitan idea in different parts of the world. My purpose here today, however, is not to showcase these important lineages.

In this essay, I first draw on the work of Inés Valdez³ and on some of my own previous work⁴ to provide persuasive examples of inclusive cosmopolitanisms. Valdez reconstructs African American philosopher Du Bois’s political vision to offer a corrective to the Kantian cosmopolitanism, adapting it to current thinking about justice, while Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield reconstruct Indian philosopher Gandhi’s political actions, offering further correctives to Kant. In this essay, I will select for particular scrutiny certain actions in the political sphere undertaken respectively by Du Bois and Gandhi in order to illuminate the notion of rationality and the productive interplay of reason, emotion, and the body that their respective cosmopolitanisms bring into focus.

I then shift my attention to Martha C. Nussbaum. Until recently one of cosmopolitanism’s staunchest defenders, Nussbaum⁵ has now turned away from cosmopolitanism entirely, arguing that it is essentially anthropocentric, and cannot include an acceptable view about justice for non-human animals. While I take Nussbaum’s criticism that the philosophical literature on cosmopolitan justice has not included a serious consideration of non-human animals, I will argue that Nussbaum is wrong to think it cannot do so. In fact, cosmopolitanism can be understood capaciously so as to accommodate non-human animals. Significantly, a cosmopolitan embrace of the non-human, rather than abandoning the core value of the distinctive human sensibility that has always distinguished cosmopolitan identity, in fact leads us to a deeper sense of what it means to be human.

COSMOPOLITANISM IN CULTURAL CONTEXT I: THE AESTHETIC PRACTICE OF DU BOIS AS A CORRECTIVE TO KANT

Inés Valdez has recently defended what she calls a transnational cosmopolitanism. This conception, she argues, is made possible by being sensitive to the specific cultural and historical contexts that produce cosmopolitan sensibilities. Her transnational cosmopolitanism is, in her words, “best theorized from the ground up by paying attention to the political craft of local groups who diagnose, alongside other differently located groups, the character of transnational justice.”⁶ She also terms this a cosmopolitanism “from below.”⁷ Valdez approaches Kantian principles through the lens provided by W. E. B. Du Bois’s struggle against the marginalization and exclusion of the voices of people of color. Although Du Bois sought a transnational—specifically, Pan-African—solidarity with other, “differently located subjects,”⁸ he viewed the commonality of experience of the marginalized and oppressed as more significant than cultural or national differences.

Valdez aligns the projects of Kant and Du Bois, taking as her point of departure the fact that both of them “lived in moments of historical rupture.”⁹ She argues that each, in their own respective ways aware of the imperialism of their time, craft a cosmopolitanism in response to the injustices they saw in their respective local contexts. There is a difference though: while Kant argues for shared rationality as the basis of shared humanity, Du Bois stresses the role of shared suffering as the ground of human solidarity.

One might see this as nothing more than a difference in emphasis: according to Du Bois, human subjects suffer in large part because they are not treated as fully rational beings, as proper subjects of moral concern, as not fully human. But this would be a mistake: this difference—that between reason and suffering as the ground of solidarity—is radical. Valdez argues that this allows Du Bois to “transfigure” cosmopolitanism, and hospitality itself, into an attitude that Kant could never have imagined.

Valdez draws particular attention to Du Bois’s reimagining of Black subjectivity occasioned by his own experiences and those of his fellow compatriots across the color line in the context of World War I. She documents Du Bois’s various aesthetic strategies of indirection, like renaming and storytelling featuring protagonists from the “darker” races. For instance, in the aftermath of the war, in his essays and pamphlets he referred to African American soldiers as “warriors,” as opposed to “laborers,” as they were in their civilian working lives. He guided public perception of these soldiers, noting the freedom and exposure to different worlds that they gained in virtue of fighting a war overseas, referring to them also as “travelers.”

At the same time, he used the term “statesmen” to refer to himself and his colleagues in the Pan-African Congress who met together to discuss world events, and saw himself as a “commentator” on events that occurred before and after the war. This was despite the fact that he did not enjoy this status in the eyes of the dominant players on the political stage. Valdez notes in particular the words Du Bois

uses to comment on the outcome of Russo-Japanese war: “a great white nation has measured arms with a colored one and been found wanting,” something that will surely be followed by the “awakening of the black and brown races.”¹⁰ These ways of thinking, speaking and writing were not inconsequential. Valdez argues that they were powerful literary “interventions” into the public arena, consequential forms of aesthetic highlighting that made it possible for Black subjects to reimagine the range and value of their experiences. Du Bois repositioned hitherto marginalized subjects as participants in a public space in order to enable them “to attain political subjectivity.”¹¹

Valdez argues that Du Bois’s experiences gave rise to “radical revisions of notions of progress, subjectivity, and publics,”¹² and in turn to a different understanding of cosmopolitanism itself. Valdez argues that by re-imagining Black subjectivity in the public realm, Du Bois manages to transfigure a central Kantian insight regarding cosmopolitan hospitality. Using Du Bois’s example of seeking and making connections with other human beings across the world, Valdez reconceives the simple right to hospitality proposed by Kant as a “hospitable embrace of others’ struggles.”¹³ In her re-conception, the abstract Kantian *right* to hospitality becomes an *obligation* to attend to the suffering of alien or marginalized others.

Valdez’s transnational cosmopolitanism shifts the focus from the colonial European context of Kant’s cosmopolitanism, which forms the basis for Kant’s reason-based human solidarity to a non-European colonized context which forms the basis for a suffering-based human solidarity. Nonetheless, the underlying vision that drives this cosmopolitanism is that we are *all* human beings who think, will, and feel, and, that those who are regarded as less than human, as not properly rational beings, suffer from being so regarded.

COSMOPOLITANISM IN CULTURAL CONTEXT II: GANDHI’S SOUL FORCE AS EMBODIED

M. K. Gandhi’s actions in colonial India provide us with an additional instance of a resonant expansion of the conceptual range of (another transnational) cosmopolitanism. I will mention just one kind of public action among the many undertaken by Gandhi, because it is controversial and adds an unexpected dimension to Kantian cosmopolitanism. Gandhi’s fasts provocatively introduce the body as a discursive instrument into the public sphere. Gandhi used his own body in his “fast unto death” political acts as means to end conflict and to foster unity (most often between Hindus and Muslims). These fasts were often effective, but one might well think that they constituted an abandonment of public discourse in favor of cheap blackmail,¹⁴ or at least an appeal to raw emotion encouraging people to take leave of their senses. In a recent essay, Jay L. Garfield and I argued that, instead, these fasts might be better understood as actions that bring people to their senses.¹⁵

Gandhi’s use of his body in this way was *not* private; nor was it an exercise in manipulation or simple emotional demand. As we have previously argued:

In each fast, Gandhi used the body as a public expression—as a *premise* in an argument designed to open people’s eyes to an injustice. The fast amounted to an assertion that Gandhi himself could not live with the injustice in question. Joined with the implicit premise that others are (or ought to be) like Gandhi in this respect, the fast entails that nobody should be able to live with that injustice.¹⁶

Gandhi thus effectively fuses the rational and the affective in public discourse, enhancing and extending Kant’s vision of the human rationality that infuses the public sphere. Gandhi intentionally uses his body as a discursive instrument, in the process expanding—although differently than does Du Bois—what it means to “reason” in the public domain.

Gandhi’s uses the notion of “soul force” or “love force,” and as expressed in these fasts, as a political and embodied emotion that is always reason-governed in the service of justice and humanity. In Gandhi’s case, therefore, a cosmopolitan attitude consists in his openness to considering how the human body and thereby the human being in all its fullness may be reimagined as a rational instrument of persuasion in the public sphere. His notion of a “soul force” crosses national boundaries. While, in the context of the fasts he undertook, he was an active Indian citizen using his body in a public Indian space, Gandhi—as is evidenced in his letters and in many public tracts—saw himself as a citizen of the world, a spokesperson for all of suffering humanity. That world, as in the case of Du Bois, included all those who were not free, regardless of country. The soul force of which Gandhi spoke, from which he acted, and which, he argued, ought to motivate the actions of all human beings, was ignited by the fact that he saw himself as a member of this larger community.

Du Bois and Gandhi, then, invite us to think about human beings, and specifically about rationality, and human suffering, more expansively. In each case, Du Bois and Gandhi imagine a public sphere that would include the voices of the hitherto silenced and marginalized. A cosmopolitan approach affords both Du Bois and Gandhi a freedom, an avenue to pursue justice in new ways by looking beyond racial or sectarian identities.

These examples suggest that the cosmopolitanism we encounter in practice is remarkably resilient: it looks different depending on the context of the encounter and on the particular human beings who, whether freely or in response to coercion by others, adopt a cosmopolitan attitude in contemplating their relation to humanity as a whole. So, while Kant’s form of cosmopolitan theorizing looks different from that of either Du Bois or Gandhi, for example, all three philosophers have a cosmopolitan idea in common: to look beyond the conventions of their own local communities for the source of meaning, of justice, and of morality, albeit rooted in the particular social and historical contexts of those human lives.

Even if one were to accept the force of these (and other) example(s) of creative cosmopolitanisms, one might argue,

however, that there is a deeper reason for skepticism about the value of cosmopolitan theorizing. It is this deeper reason in which I am most interested; it takes us to the next section of this paper, and to Nussbaum’s most recent work on cosmopolitanism and her discontent with it.

COSMOPOLITANISM AND ITS LIMITATIONS: NUSSBAUM’S CRITIQUE OF A “NOBLE BUT FLAWED IDEAL”

In *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal*,¹⁷ Martha C. Nussbaum, hitherto a staunch defender of the ideal, gives up on her earlier defense of cosmopolitanism, one that she articulated most notably in *Cultivating Humanity*.¹⁸ In this earlier 1997 text, Nussbaum provides her reader with a blueprint for the kind of liberal education that would cultivate those qualities in young people that would benefit humanity as a whole rather than fostering primary allegiance to more local communitarian identities. In her 2019 text, she continues to explore the contours of this “noble . . . ideal” but ends by arguing that while one might be able to provide nuance to some of cosmopolitanism’s earlier iterations (versions found in the Stoics, in Kant, and in Adam Smith), cosmopolitan theorizing needs to be given up entirely because it has a fatal flaw. Even if, she argues, one could somehow correct cosmopolitanism so as to make it sufficiently inclusive, to include all human beings, including those with severe cognitive disabilities—and that would be a big correction indeed—the cosmopolitan tradition remains “relentlessly anthropocentric.”¹⁹ Since it cannot legitimately include non-human animals under its rubric, “the tradition must be rejected.”²⁰ I will argue that Nussbaum underestimates the resources of cosmopolitanism for crossing even the species divide.

WHY NUSSBAUM’S CRITIQUE OF COSMOPOLITANISM FAILS OR: AN ANTHROPOMORPHISM WITHOUT GUILT

In 1973, Thomas Nagel wrote an essay that forever changed the trajectory of philosophy of mind and our thinking about the nature of subjectivity. He called it “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”²¹ Nagel invites us to try out imaginative projection—what might it be like to be a creature that is in so many ways radically different from us? Nagel’s own conclusion was that we have no idea: he argued persuasively that no matter how hard we try, there is only so far that we can go. This is our epistemic predicament. As Nietzsche famously put it a century before Nagel, “we cannot look around our own corner.”²² Nevertheless—and this points to our insistent anthropomorphic tendency as human beings—we try to imagine what it might be like, even as we recognize that all such imaginings are from our all-too-human perspective.

To try to understand a non-human animal’s form of life, even if it turns out that our efforts end in failure, is morally significant: it is to recognize that their lives have dignity, to acknowledge their value, to affirm that they are worth knowing. It calls attention to a central human capacity: to find kinship with familiar others and to seek connection with unfamiliar others. To do so is not to project our attributes

on to others so that we view them as “just like us.” That would be crass anthropomorphism. A genuinely reflective disposition consists in an open curiosity and feeling of wonder in the company of strange others. It is to assume that another *has* a way of seeing or being in the world, but to acknowledge that we do not know in what that way of seeing or being consists, and to be open to learning, just as we should be epistemically humble regarding the perspectives of humans from whom we are culturally distant. This is to be cosmopolitan.

To regard non-human animals as fashioned in our image, what Nussbaum calls the “so like us” approach,²³ is to succumb to cheap anthropomorphism, to attempt to explain the behavior of a strange other by merely imagining how we would approach a particular task, rather than considering how that creature, given *its* anatomical structure and mode of life, might approach such a task. This kind of anthropomorphism that involves an unreflective projection of our mode of life onto other animals is morally problematic.²⁴ Consider what we already know of the tyranny of presumed familiarity, even with *human* others, which involves an unreflective projection onto others, with a heavy moral cost.

To be reflective and to be cosmopolitan with respect to animals, therefore, would be to adopt a healthy skepticism regarding our own attributions of attitudes to them and an openness to what it might be like for humans who are not us; for creatures who are not us; to the possibility of animal life worlds radically different from our own.

CONCLUSION: COSMOPOLITAN RISK, COSMOPOLITAN HOPE

The cosmopolitan sees both her separation from and affinity with other animals, nature itself, and the divine. To cultivate *humanity*—the core of cosmopolitanism—is to cultivate a sense of justice to oneself, to familiar others, and to unfamiliar others, be they human or non-human. That demands awareness not only of the commonalities between us, but also of the differences between us and our fellow creatures, whether these are human or not. Not to do so is to confuse sympathy with disrespect.

Cosmopolitanism is fundamentally about what it means to be human. To be human is to be a remarkably creative creature, for which the ability “to reason” is just the tip of the iceberg. Human beings are embodied reflective creatures, who suffer and can make sense of that suffering, who are capable of feeling and expressing a range of emotions, and who can imagine themselves and others in and into distinct possible worlds. They have the ability to construct narrative, to play/imagine/pretend/visualize in community with others. This imaginative and empathetic projective ability—into the past, future, and especially into the lives of creatures very different from humans—is inextricably part of what it means to be a rational creature. What I call reasoning is therefore perhaps better regarded as a way of seeing, which is also a way to make sense of the interplay of these many dizzying capacities. This human capaciousness generates models for aesthetic, ethical, political, and economic flourishing not tied to

reason narrowly construed, nor reducible to ethnicity, race, culture, tradition, or nation.

Cosmopolitanism demands and deploys a specific ability that, when cultivated, makes human beings distinctive. But this view of the human creature does not entitle us to epistemic arrogance; rather, it lends itself to a deep and abiding epistemic humility regarding the perspective of all, including non-human, others.

NOTES

1. The artist William Kentridge made these observations in a lecture on art; reported in Susan Tallman, “What Happens at the Edges?” *The New York Review of Books* 70, no. 20 (2023): 10, emphasis added.
2. Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Harvard University Press, 2012); Allen Carey-Webb, *Making Subject(s): Literature and the Emergence of National Identity* (Routledge, 1998); Jonardon Ganeri, “Freedom in Thinking: The Immersive Cosmopolitanism of Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri (Oxford University Press, 2017), 718–36; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2006); Kok-Chor Tan, “Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism,” in *The Cosmopolitanism Reader*, ed. Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held (Polity Press, 2010), 176–90; Inés Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Yarran Hominh, “The Radical Possibilities of Forced Cosmopolitanism” (this issue); Nalini Bhushan, “On James Mill’s Paternalistic Cosmopolitanism” (unpublished manuscript).
3. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*.
4. Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield, “Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism: Glimpses of His Enlightenment Aspirations,” *APA Studies on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 22, no. 1 (2022): 67–73. Our contribution is part of a special issue on the Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, edited by A. Minh Nguyen, Yarran Hominh, and Douglas Allen, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/collection/2EAF6689-4B0D-4CCB-9DC6-FB926D8FF530/APA_Studies_on_Asian_Philosophy_V22_n1.pdf.
5. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Harvard University Press, 2019); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility* (Simon and Schuster, 2022).
6. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 176.
7. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 177.
8. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 182.
9. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 176.
10. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 98, citing W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Color Line Belts the World,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, ed. Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson (University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 33–34.
11. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 98.
12. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 80.
13. Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*, 102.
14. B. R. Ambedkar uses just such language in the context of Gandhi’s fasts against separate Dalit electorates, dismissing them as political stunts. See, for instance, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, ed. Vasant Moon (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1991), 19:317. For a more nuanced view of the relation between Ambedkar and Gandhi, see Gopal Guru, “Ethics in Ambedkar’s Critique of Gandhi,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 15 (2017): 95–100.
15. Bhushan and Garfield, “Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism.”
16. Bhushan and Garfield, “Gandhi’s Cosmopolitanism,” 72.
17. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*.

18. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Harvard University Press, 1997).
19. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, 237.
20. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, 237. In *Justice for Animals*, Nussbaum defends a different theory, a version of the “capabilities approach” that enables an affirmation of the dignity not just of humans but of all sentient beings. Interestingly, even in this work, whose approach seems very different from the cosmopolitan approach, Nussbaum needs to address the charge that her list of traits that matter in the context of the capabilities approach is likely to be anthropomorphic. See Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals*, 102ff.
21. Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4: 435–50.
22. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Random House, 1974), 336.
23. Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals*, 19–29.
24. Frans B. M. de. Waal has argued against just such an anthropocentric anthropomorphism, which attempts to explain the behavior of a strange other by merely imagining how we would approach such a task. See Frans B. M. de. Waal, “Anthropomorphism and Anthropodenial: Consistency in Our Thinking about Humans and Other Animals,” *Philosophical Topics* 27, no. 1 (1999): 255–80. And intuitive anthropomorphism as an implicit cognitive bias is a well-known criticism in the literature on animals and animal rights. See, for instance, Mike Dacey, “Anthropomorphism as Cognitive Bias,” *Philosophy of Science* 84, no. 5 (2017): 1152–64.

When Fazang Meets Cosmopolitanism

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ABSTRACT

Fazang (643–712) was a Chinese Buddhist philosopher of the Tang dynasty and the third patriarch of Huayan Buddhism. In this project, I argue that Fazang’s philosophy can shed light on our discussion of contemporary Western cosmopolitanism, despite the radical differences of time and space. First, I will show that Fazang’s vision of the cosmos is totalistic and everything is identical because they all belong to one body, which requires us to treat all things, including sentient and insentient as well, with equal concern and care. Then, I will show that Fazang’s metaphysical and ethical views could be insightful for developing an account of cosmopolitanism from a non-Western classical source, which is much needed in contemporary cosmopolitanism. The reason is that his metaphysical view can affirm the universal identity of human beings as members of one community, and his ethical view would be compatible with a moderate version of cosmopolitanism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fazang (643–712) was a Chinese Buddhist philosopher of the Tang dynasty and the third patriarch of Huayan Buddhism. Fazang had a multicultural background.¹ His grandfather was from Sogdiana, a place in central Asia that was influenced by multiple traditions, including Indian, Greco-Roman, and Central Asian traditions. As a Sogdian immigrant, Fazang was born and raised in Chang’an, the most prosperous and cosmopolitan city in the world at the time. These pieces of information about his life fit well with

the topic of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, it would be great if we could know how Fazang dealt with his multicultural background, what his life was like as an immigrant in the cosmopolitan city, or whether his unique life experience influenced his philosophy. While this is an interesting study to undertake, the main goal of this essay is to bring his philosophy and cosmopolitanism into conversation.

Do all human beings belong to one community of the world? If so, what implications does this universal membership have for our ethical obligations to other people? These are the key questions contemporary cosmopolitan philosophers seek to answer. In this essay, I argue that Fazang’s philosophy can shed light on answering these questions. Here is the roadmap: In Section 2, I discuss Fazang’s metaphysical view of existence and its ethical implications. In Section 3, I connect Fazang’s metaphysical view and ethical view to contemporary Western cosmopolitanism. I show that Fazang’s philosophy can support the cosmopolitan claim that all human beings are interconnected as members of the same community and that his philosophy could line up with a moderate version of cosmopolitanism.

2. FAZANG’S TOTALISTIC WORLDVIEW: THE UNIVERSE OF IDENTITY AND INDEPENDENCE

To understand the significance of Fazang’s contributions to the dialogues of cosmopolitanism, we need to first understand his view of the universe. Living in a modern society consisting of strangers, many people may find it difficult to see that there is a close connection between us and people distant from us. In this sense, a fair warning is that Fazang’s view of the cosmos would be a great shock to them. According to Huayan Buddhism, the whole universe is an organic entity that is analogous to Lord Indra’s Net, of which Cook offers a beautiful explanation:

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net that has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of the deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each “eye” of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.²

While this metaphor demonstrates the cosmos where everything is simultaneously identical and interdependent, the arguments behind it need some unpacking.

The first argument is about the identity of all dharmas or phenomena. In Fazang’s view, all dharmas are fundamentally identical. Why? The analogy of building and rafters in Fazang’s *Treatise of the Five Teachings* can be helpful.³ In

this metaphor, Fazang lets the building present the totality of existence or the universe, and rafters represent dharmas or particular phenomena. Rafters and other materials, such as the planks and roof tiles, consist of the building.

Now let us focus on one of the rafters (call it "Rafter A"). Rafter A is existent because it functions as the cause of the whole building, while the remaining rafters and materials are *empty* because their existence is conditioned. However, according to Fazang's teachings, while Rafter A exists, it is wrong to say that Rafter A has an ultimate self-existence, for it exists as a rafter only in the context of the building. After all, without being part of the building, Rafter A is just a piece of wood that may be used for other purposes (e.g., a coffee table). If we shift our attention to a different rafter (call it "Rafter B"), then Rafter B exists as the cause of the whole building, while the remaining rafters (including Rafter A) and other materials are empty as the products of conditions. The same relationship of existence and emptiness can apply to all the parts of the building. Thus, for Fazang, everything simultaneously possesses the same identity of emptiness and existence: they are existent because they are empty.

The next argument is about interdependence. For Fazang, each dharma has power and lacks power. Again, the analogy of the rafter and the building can make this clearer. If we analyze Rafter A with regards to the creation of the building, then other rafters and materials are *powerless* since there are merely the conditions that help Rafter A create the building. In this sense, their powerlessness highlights the function of Rafter A as the cause to create the building. However, simultaneously, Rafter A is also powerless when viewed from other rafters and materials because, under this circumstance, it becomes the condition of other causes. If so, everything in the universe functions as the cause for everything else, and vice versa.

However, while Fazang claims every dharma is simultaneously identical and interdependent, he also points out that every dharma is also different from each other:

Because if they are not different, the roof tiles are identical with the eight-foot-long rafters. This is to destroy their character as fundamental conditions [for the building] and make it impossible for them to construct the building together.⁴

In his view, dharmas have their different properties. Just like the metaphor of rafters tells us, if every dharma is the same, then no universe (like the one we have) will exist at all. Hence, in Fazang's view, everything is identical in the sense of its function to create the whole while respecting each other and letting other parts be what they are.

Now this is the picture that Fazang describes to us: a web (just like Lord Indra's Net) where everything is simultaneously identical and interdependent. To quote Fazang's saying in "Essay on the Golden Lion," *All is one* because all are the same in lacking an individual nature; *one is all* because cause and effect follow one another endlessly.⁵ This is true in the relationship between the rafter and the building. It is

also true for anything concerning the whole, including one human part to the whole body or anything to the whole universe.

While this totalistic picture sounds intriguing, one might question how we can be sure that it is an accurate depiction of the world. For Fazang and other Buddhists, this is not a conceptual question that can be answered through reading philosophical texts or intellectual inquiry in general.⁶ Thus, to realize the vision outlined by Fazang, we must rely on non-conceptual activities such as meditations. In this sense, the philosophical thoughts Fazang discusses "is to be a lure which attracts the aspirant to the practice which will presumably culminate in an existential, or experiential, validation of what was before only theory."⁷

Although it is difficult to determine whether this is an accurate picture philosophically, we should not discredit it too quickly. Such a totalistic view includes some advantages that other metaphysical positions lack. For example, if we believe that an individualistic metaphysics (e.g., Cartesian assumptions about self and substance) is true, we may see the self as the center of the world and accept the dichotomy of subject and object, which might lead to egoism. As Elle Zhang claims, "the Buddhist idea of a relational and causal self is helpful to see the limit of a self-constituting world order when the logic of exclusion becomes the ontological foundation of all modes of subjectivity."⁸ Neither should we treat it as something completely mystical. Without following the practical means recommended by the Buddhists, we can still realize the picture Fazang draws out for us. It should not be too difficult to draw a connection between two things or events in the universe. For instance, Van Norden makes sense of Fazang's view by appealing to the phenomenon in meteorology: "extremely small atmospheric changes (like the beating of a butterfly's wings in Brazil) can have massive consequences (like a hurricane in Florida)."⁹

For Fazang, the metaphysical truth has enormous implications for what we should do ethically. In his treatise "Cultivation of Contemplation of the Inner Meaning of the Hua-yen," Fazang explicates the metaphysics-ethics connection. For him, once we understand the reality of mutual identity and interdependence, we should practice four types of virtues.¹⁰ I will focus here on the third and fourth virtues.

The third virtue is "treating being gently and harmoniously, honestly and straightforwardly."¹¹ For Fazang, "honest straightforwardness" means divorcing from ignorance and knowing the true reality of mutual identity honestly and straightforwardly. In turn, such knowledge will direct our ethical compassion so that we can treat beings gently and harmoniously without concern for profit or fame.¹² As Cook puts it, "for if my own existence is unthinkable apart from the existence of this infinite other, and if my own actions touch these beings in some manner, then I must have an obligation to act in such a way that all benefit from the acts."¹³

The fourth virtue is "accepting suffering in place of all sentient beings."¹⁴ This means that we should cultivate

ourselves not for our own sake, “but only wishing generally to benefit myriad beings, enemies and friends equally, causing all to stop evil and fully cultivate myriad practices to realize enlightenment.”¹⁵ For Fazang, this is what bodhisattvas exemplify. With compassion and determination, they “use their bodies as goods to ransom all suffering beings from states of misery in order to cause them to attain happiness” without “having the slightest wish or hope for reward from sentient beings.”¹⁶ As Cook puts it, “the Bodhisattva cannot make a selfish, brash assault on the citadel of nirvana because he knows he is not alone and that no one can enter alone.”¹⁷ One might still see bodhisattvas as selfish since the reason they help others is that they want to achieve their ultimate good. However, this would be a misunderstanding of Huayan Buddhism. According to Huayan Buddhism, the self is empty and we are all but one body, thus we cannot separate our fate from the rest of the totality.¹⁸

Ultimately, when we fully understand the true reality, we can treat all sentient beings (even those animals people consider ugly or awful: e.g., rats in New York City) and insentient beings equally with compassion.¹⁹ To highlight, this compassion is different from the common types of love (e.g., parents’ love for their children, patriotic love):

We may, perhaps, think of it as “metaphysical compassion”. . . . If anything, Buddhist love is something akin to that love of which Dante spoke so movingly and beautifully, as “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.” At first glance this may seem to be an outrageous exaggeration, but this compassion is not the compassion of the common man; it is the occurrence in space and time of a compassion which pervades then thousand galaxies and realizes itself in them, individual by individual.²⁰

Just like the love of bodhisattvas for all, this form of compassion is completely selfless and extends universally to infinity.

Before ending this section, another significant implication is that the Huayan universe would also include a form of universal equality. That is, every sentient being integrates into the total vision and has the potential to achieve the stage of perfection (i.e., the seed of Buddhahood). Because of this, Fang Dongmei, a prominent Chinese philosopher of the last century, claims that it can be called the “highest spiritual democracy.”²¹

3. FAZANG AND COSMOPOLITANISM: THE LOVE FOR HUMANITY AND BEYOND

Cosmopolitanism originates from the Western tradition, and in recent decades, cosmopolitanism has received a significant revival in the context of globalization and the resulting mobilization of people and ideas beyond borders. There are various contemporary accounts of cosmopolitanism, including political cosmopolitanism that, roughly speaking, seeks to establish a world-state and moral cosmopolitanism that does not explicitly have a world-state in its agenda. Due to space constraints, it is

impossible to offer an overview of various contemporary cosmopolitanisms here. Therefore, I will merely focus on moral cosmopolitanism and briefly discuss some of the most representative ones.

First is Martha C. Nussbaum’s liberal accounts of cosmopolitanism, which is inspired by the cosmopolitanism of Diogenes the Cynic (c. 404–323 BCE) and relies on Kantian moral theory. According to this account, every person enjoys the same moral status. Thus, as a citizen of the world, we should treat every person *equally* without regard for factors such as family, nationality, culture, etc.²² Moreover, we should treat all humans as our fellow citizens and our first allegiances and respect should be attributed to no form of governance, but the humanity of all human beings.²³ Her account was criticized by numerous scholars for its heavy reliance on the Kantian universal moral imperative for human beings and its insensitivity to the influences of communities or traditions over people’s emotions and ethical lives.

An alternative account has been proposed by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Unlike Nussbaum’s account, Appiah’s is more socially and culturally sensitive. For him, human beings naturally live in different communities (tribes, nations, etc.), while the shared humanity is also true. Accordingly, he recognizes that “these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate differences—clash.”²⁴ The account of cosmopolitanism he defends, which he dubbed “partial” cosmopolitanism, is a solution for balancing the allegiances to communities (e.g., being a patriot) and the loyalty to all of humanity, without one-sidedly subscribing to an abstract conception of humanity or the world.

As Ivanhoe observes, these theories of cosmopolitanism and others remain undeveloped and controversial mainly because “they all arise from the Western philosophical tradition and employ its characteristic assumptions and approaches.”²⁵ Subsequently, he advocates that we should develop new theories and visions of cosmopolitanism by drawing from non-Western sources. In light of that, the totalistic picture depicted by Fazang and its resulting ethical system would be relevant, and I will explore this possibility hereafter. To clarify, my aim is not to prove that these potential approaches are superior to the Western ones. Neither do I intend to show that these approaches are practically possible. Rather, I aim to show that Fazang’s philosophy could be insightful for developing new approaches to cosmopolitanism.

In defense of their accounts, contemporary cosmopolitans often appeal to human interconnectedness. Philosophers standardly express this thought in terms of shared humanity, which may seem abstract to a lot of people. However, it is made realistically imaginable thanks to globalization and modern technologies of information and transportation, which also greatly strengthen our capacities to do both good and harm to each other, even those distant strangers. As Appiah puts it, “human community has gradually been drawn into a single web of trade and a global network of information, have we come to a point where each of us can realistically imagine contacting any other of our six billion conspecifics and sending that person something worth having: a radio, an antibiotic, a

good idea.”²⁶ Due to interconnectedness resulting from these modern conditions, our actions can easily have positive or negative impacts on any member of humanity. Moreover, “the possibilities of good and of ill are multiplied beyond all measure when it comes to policies carried out by governments in our name.”²⁷ Collectively, we can do terrible things to humanity such as delivering weapons to kill hundreds of thousands of people; we can also do great things such as taking measures against global warming.

These forms of modern conditions were not available to Fazang. Still, Fazang could affirm the idea that human beings are interconnected. As discussed in Section 2, this kind of human interconnectedness is embedded in his totalistic cosmos of identity and interdependence. However, it is not based on the assumption of personhood that we are all autonomous agents, but on the belief that we do not enjoy self-existence, our existence is conditioned on one body, and ultimately we are connected because we are all one being. That is, interconnectedness is entailed by oneness. Certainly, the perception of this vision is not available to common people. It must be cultivated through practical means such as meditation, although we could speculate whether modern technologies could make this process easier for laypersons. (It is noteworthy that Fazang would affirm the claim that merely human interconnectedness would be an understatement. This is because, as we discussed, not only are human beings interconnected, but everything in the universe is also interconnected.)

In contrast, non-cosmopolitans (e.g., liberal nationalists) argue against cosmopolitanism by highlighting the significance of group memberships. In particular, Yael Tamir, the leading scholar of liberal nationalism, questions the role of the category of humanity in defining our identity:

Categorization is deeply grounded in human psychology—it is a necessary tool of self-definition. The term *human* is a far too thin mode of delineation. Individuals need to rely on “thick identities” to make their lives meaningful.²⁸

For her, national membership is essential for developing our self-definition and self-esteem, which is deeply rooted in our psychological needs.

From the perspective of Fazang, Tamir’s concern that the category of humanity may be too thin could be legitimate to some extent. This is because it would be difficult for common people to identify, emotionally or intellectually, with this category just as not everyone could obtain the corporeal eye of universal vision. Not surprisingly, the fundamental problem with the liberal nationalist approach, Fazang would say, is that it seeks an atomistic identity that can essentially distinguish us from others. In doing so, they fail to appreciate the larger picture beyond the nation and the dynamic interactions among nations, especially in the age of global warming and when the memory of the COVID-19 pandemic is still fresh.

To recapitulate, Fazang’s emphasis on the identity of the whole does not mean that he ignores the differences among parts since, he argues, all things are the same because they are different. In this universe, all things can find their place where they can function in their different roles without being interfered with. This applies not only to his analogy of the rafter as a part and the building as a whole but also to the relationship between one nation and all other nations. In this sense, Fazang’s totalistic vision advocates a strong sense of inclusiveness, which is much needed in building a cosmopolitan culture, where every nation can also be “in its place and completely established.”²⁹ In this inclusive universe, there will be a strong attitude of fairness since everything is the cause and result at the same time.

So far, I have shown that Fazang would lend support to cosmopolitans regarding their idea that all human beings are world citizens of the universal community, although his claim is much broader than this since “all is one and one is all.” Next, I focus on the issue of ethical obligations.

A main debate between cosmopolitans and non-cosmopolitans is our ethical responsibility to others. Non-cosmopolitans think “state or national membership is salient in determining the kinds of duties we have to one another,” although “they often endorse fairly robust responsibilities to non-compatriots, even if those responsibilities differ in kind from those we have to compatriots.”³⁰ Tamir’s liberal nationalism could be a good example. In contrast, cosmopolitans begin from the premise that all humans are members of the same community and should be treated with equal concern and respect regardless of their afflictions.³¹ However, cosmopolitans would disagree about what this idea of moral equality entails. Some cosmopolitans (“strict cosmopolitans”), out of different moral reasons (Kantian or utilitarian), claim that most of the time our ethical responsibility to others should not be weighed against our local responsibilities toward those who are near and dear to us: e.g., Nussbaum’s account above.³² However, some cosmopolitans (“moderate cosmopolitans” or “partial cosmopolitans” in Appiah’s words) adopt a less radical stance and argue that although the cosmopolitans need to treat every human equally, we also have a special obligation to their compatriots. A paradigmatic case would be Appiah’s account. So far, scholars commonly find strict cosmopolitanism implausible.

Which form of cosmopolitanism would be compatible with Fazang’s philosophy? As explained in Section 2, Fazang’s totalistic vision entails a type of universal compassion. That is, we have (the same) ethical obligations towards all beings in the universe. In this sense, it seems that strict cosmopolitanism would be the right candidate. However, the answer is more complicated, which can be found in the debate between Buddhists and Confucians regarding filial piety.

When Buddhism was introduced to China and became popular there, it clashed with one dominant indigenous philosophy—Confucianism. Confucians value the ethical significance of special relationships, especially familial relations. Accordingly, although Confucians admit that we have a concern for all human beings, they do not think that

we owe everybody an equal amount of concern. Instead, they advocate a type of care with distinctions and our care for our family should be much stronger than strangers since it is natural to care more about people who are dear and near to us.³³ However, Confucians admit that we can (and should) extend our care beyond family, of which our familial love is the root, and treat everyone in the universe as our family, although the fact that we should care more about our family will not change. Neo-Confucian thinker Zhang Zai states the vision well in his famous “Western Inscription.” He says, “All under Heaven who are tired, crippled, exhausted, sick, brotherless, childless, widows or widowers—all are my siblings who are helpless and have no one else to appeal to.”³⁴

Thus, a major problem Neo-Confucians had with Buddhism is that the Buddhists advocate universal compassion without distinguishing our special duties to people, a criticism similar to the one that early Confucians (i.e., Mengzi) had for their Mohist opponents. For example, in his fierce criticism of Buddhism, the Neo-Confucian thinker of the Tang Dynasty Han Yu says, “[Buddha] did not know of righteousness between ruler and minister, or of the feelings between father and son.”³⁵ This line of reason was made more explicitly by the later Neo-Confucian thinker Zhu Xi, the synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism:

To understand the teachings of Buddhism . . . we do not need a detailed analysis. Their greatest crime is just one thing: they reject the Three Bonds (the relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife) and the Five Constants. There is no need to speak of anything else.³⁶

Since Confucians, in general, see special relationships as fundamental in our ethical life, they would argue that the universal compassion of Buddhism is rootless, which is similar to Tamir’s argument against cosmopolitanism discussed above.

If it is true that Buddhism fails to appreciate the importance of our “special” duties to the near and dear, particularly filial piety, then it would have a problem maintaining a “realistic” position in our real life. However, as Guan Xing points out, early Buddhism included the teaching of filial piety, which was later used by Chinese Buddhists in their response to Confucian criticisms. In particular, the fifth patriarch of Huayan Buddhism Zongmi declared in his commentary on the *Ullambana Sutra* that “both Buddhism and Confucianism had filial piety as their central teaching.”³⁷ Also, Zongmi quotes *Fanwang Jing* to support his claim: “[One should have] filial piety toward parents, teachers, monks, and the three treasures (Buddhism). Filial piety is a teaching of the ultimate way [to attain enlightenment]. Filial piety is called precepts, and also called prevention.”³⁸ While Chinese Buddhists argue that filial piety is also central to Buddhism, their argument may not convince their Confucian opponents. The reason is that the worldviews of Confucianism and Buddhism are different from each other. The former sees filial piety as intrinsically valuable and irreplaceable, whereas the latter seems to treat it as instrumentally valuable, which is just a transient stage for the ultimate state.

Putting aside the fundamental differences regarding the worldview, I think Chinese Buddhists offer a good argument regarding universal compassion being too demanding and implausible. The gist is that universal compassion is a noble ideal. Although we cannot achieve it fully due to the constraints of realities (e.g., human psychology), it can still be action-guiding and help us approximate it. In this sense, learning how to love our parents is just a preliminary stage of the process of approximation. Although filial piety may clash with the ideal of universal compassion in some circumstances, they are not entirely incompatible.

Now we can return to the discussion of Fazang’s philosophy and cosmopolitanism. Based on the discussion of filial piety, it is quite clear that Fazang’s philosophy could be compatible with moderate cosmopolitanism. If it is true that the love for our compatriots is also a part of our national inclinations and would be important for developing our capacity of love in the wider scope, then the Buddhists have a strong reason to acknowledge its legitimacy, although they also would face the clash between the love of our compatriots and the universal compassion, something that Appiah notices and tries to address. Due to the limited space, I cannot explore how both can enlighten each other on this issue, which would be worth pursuing in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I argued that Fazang’s philosophy can provide sights for contemporary cosmopolitanism from a non-Western tradition. First, I discussed Fazang’s totalistic vision of the universe and its resulting ethical implications. Then I brought Fazang’s philosophy and contemporary cosmopolitanism together and discussed how Fazang could lend support to the identity of human beings as world citizens and why Fazang’s philosophy would adopt a more defensible version of cosmopolitanism, which allows special duties and universal duties to co-exist. However, many issues merit further investigation, but I could not cover them here. For example, it would be interesting to see how Buddhism deals with the clash between two sets of duties as mentioned above. Also, we should explore how the non-conceptual elements of Buddhism (e.g., meditation) can help us develop a robust program of cosmopolitan education.

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NOTES

1. Fazang had an extraordinary life as a religious practitioner and leader and an influential figure in the Tang Dynasty court, which I cannot describe or explain here. For a detailed discussion of Fazang’s life and works, see Chen, *Philosopher, Practitioner, Politician*.
2. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 2.

3. The translation I use here is from Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*, 82–86.
4. Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*, 84.
5. Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*, 88.
6. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 73.
7. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 109.
8. Zhang, "When Buddhism Meets Cosmopolitanism."
9. Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy*, 51.
10. Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, 160. I thank Nicholas Jones for pointing out this connection to me.
11. Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, 160.
12. Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, 160.
13. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 118.
14. Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, 160.
15. Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, 160.
16. Cleary, *Entry Into the Inconceivable*, 160.
17. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 118.
18. However, for Fazang, "emptiness" does not mean "non-existence" or "annihilationism" (Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*, 86). As mentioned, all things are identical, but this does not hinder myriad differences among individuals. Thus, for Fazang, the talk of emptiness does not lead to the confusion or cancellation of moral agency. I thank Stephen C. Walker for pressing me on this issue.
19. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 121.
20. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 121–22.
21. Fang, *The Philosophy of Huayan Buddhism*, 2:820.
22. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," 7–8.
23. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," 7.
24. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 2.
25. Ivanhoe, "Contemporary Accounts of Cosmopolitanism."
26. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 1.
27. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 1.
28. Tamir, *Why Nationalism?* 43.
29. Tiwald and Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*, 89.
30. Brock, "Rethinking," 1.
31. Brock, "Rethinking," 1.
32. Kleingeld and Brown, "Cosmopolitanism."
33. Tiwald, "Confucian Cosmopolitanism."
34. Tiwald, "Confucian Cosmopolitanism," 135.
35. Tiwald, "Confucian Cosmopolitanism," 125.
36. Zhu, "Criticisms of Buddhism," 144.
37. Xing, *Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism*, 120.
38. Xing, *Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism*, 120.

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Making Sense of Confucian Cosmopolitanism

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ABSTRACT

Confucian cosmopolitanism has attracted growing interest from cross-cultural philosophers in the last decade. Attempts to develop this concept, however, face the challenge of reconciling the ideal of world citizenship with the early Confucian emphasis on caring for one's family members first and foremost. In this paper, I examine a couple of recent accounts of Confucian cosmopolitanism from Philip J. Ivanhoe and Tongdong Bai. While Ivanhoe's account emphasizes moral cosmopolitanism and Bai's is focused on the political sphere, they both address the priority of particular relationships in early Confucian philosophy. I discuss a special challenge for these accounts and explore some strategies for making sense of Confucian cosmopolitanism.

Confucian cosmopolitanism, according to recent interpretations, prioritizes care for family and community

members while at the same time maintaining that we should extend this care to those outside of these relationships. As such, the Confucian view is a version of what Samuel Scheffler calls *moderate cosmopolitanism*, which sees one's duties as a citizen of the world as compatible with special obligations. One challenge that Scheffler raises for the moderate view is that, once a person is cut off from their community's "infrastructure of responsibility" that shapes how they interact family and community members, they will have little on which to base cosmopolitan interactions. In this paper, I argue that the Confucian view is especially susceptible to this challenge. I examine some resources by which Confucians might attempt to address the problem, while also drawing attention to the limitations of these resources.

1. RECENT ACCOUNTS OF CONFUCIAN COSMOPOLITANISM

In the last decade, many scholars have attempted to address the topic of Confucian cosmopolitanism. While these accounts emphasize different elements of the Confucian tradition, one point of reference has been the concept of differential or gradated love, in which a person cultivates care for their family members first and foremost, then extends this love outward to members of their immediate community and the world at large. As Sor-hoon Tan puts this point, "A Confucian could care for all under heaven, but not equally or in the same way since some persons are related more closely to oneself in ways that generate differential ethical responsibilities towards such particular others."¹

In a prominent account, Philip J. Ivanhoe defends a notion of Confucian cosmopolitanism as the "attitude of seeing other people as part of one's family."² He points to the following passage from the *Analects* as a basis for this view:

Anxiously, Sima Niu remarked, "Everyone has brothers, I alone have none." Zixia replied, "I have heard it said, 'Life and death are governed by fate, wealth and honor are determined by Heaven.' A gentleman is respectful and free of errors. He is reverent and ritually proper in his dealings with others. In this way, everyone within the Four Seas is his brother. How could a gentleman be concerned about not having brothers?"³

As Ivanhoe notes, this passage sets a high standard for the treatment of strangers that we encounter in the world. It compels us to apply the same feelings that we have for our close family members to "everyone within the Four Seas." It is more plausible, he thinks, for Confucians to approach cosmopolitanism by viewing humanity as a common family than to begin from a conception of shared world citizenship.

At the same time, Ivanhoe also points to the Confucian view that one's commitments decrease as one moves outside of the family, so that as we expand our moral circle, the intensity of our care and concern is lessened. The Confucian thinker Mencius gives expression to the greater care and responsibility that we owe to family members when he says that "[i]n relation to the people, [gentlemen]

are benevolent (ren 仁) toward them but do not treat them as kin (qin 親). They treat their kin as kin, and then are benevolent toward the people."⁴

For this reason, Ivanhoe goes on to argue, the Confucian view has advantages over Kantian versions of cosmopolitanism, such as the one defended by Martha C. Nussbaum, which view humans in terms of their shared moral capacity. Paraphrasing a criticism of this view, he writes that "[h]uman beings are not brought into the world as rational moral agents; we come in as someone's daughter or son, in particular communities, with specific heritages, etc. As we mature, it is through these social aspects of life, that we come to understand ourselves and others."⁵ The Confucian tradition, according to Ivanhoe, does justice to the actual communities and traditions in which human moral life takes place. Instead of asking us to abstract from our particular relationships in our treatment of others, it takes these relationships as a starting point. As such, Confucian cosmopolitanism is a "distinctively humanistic point of view" that starts from the connection between self and others rather than from an overarching political ideal.⁶

While Ivanhoe's account focuses on ethics rather than politics, Tongdong Bai relies on the concept of differentiated love to develop Confucian cosmopolitanism within the political sphere. His discussion begins with the same two features of Confucian care that Ivanhoe mentions: first, that this care is supposed to be extended to the whole world; and second, that it is more strongly expressed toward those who are closest to us. As Bai says, the potential conflict between these two features "demands a skillful balance."⁷ Importantly for his discussion, the balance is not just one between caring for family members and caring for outsiders, but also between duties to one's own state and duties towards other states and peoples.

The concept of differential love, according to Bai, justifies some measure of patriotism, though it would stop at extreme nationalism. Just as care for one's family members prepares one to care for community members, care for one's fellow citizens prepares a person to care for members of the world community. He quotes the eleventh-century Confucian Sima Guang, who says that "the exemplary person holds his kin dear, and extends this feeling to the kin of others; he loves his own country, and extends this love to the countries of others."⁸

Yet as Bai goes on to argue, Confucians argue for "priority" rather than "supremacy." In the case of a flood, for example, while one should help one's fellow citizens first, one must not do so at the expense of harming citizens of other countries; moreover, after helping one's fellows, one must look after one's neighbors.⁹ The Confucian model, according to Bai, thus strikes a balance between nationalism and a cosmopolitanism that requires us to care equally for each member of the world community. Just as classical Confucians such as Mencius rejected both Yang Zhu's doctrine of ethical egoism, on the one hand, and Mozi's advocacy of impartial caring, on the other, contemporary Confucianism will strike a balance between extremes in thinking about obligations towards other states.¹⁰

As Bai notes, this type of view nonetheless leaves us with a difficulty in thinking about issues such as the treatment of refugees. He writes: "A serious challenge to the Confucian solution here is: What if due to some humanitarian crisis, a very large number of refugees need to find a safe place? To accept them in one or several states may be too much for these states, but to reject them means to let them die." Some of the issue, he thinks, is in defining what constitutes a disruption to the lives of the citizens serious enough to reject the refugees in need. Yet even so, Bai says that he does not have a good solution to this case.¹¹

While the Confucian account gives us a plausible means by which we can cultivate respect and sympathy for our fellow members of the world community, it also will in some cases involve a tradeoff between caring for those closest to us and helping those we do not know as well. At the level of ordinary relationships, texts such as the *Analects* and the *Mencius* have notable cases in which exemplary figures balance their duties between family and state by focusing solely on their family members at apparent expense to society at large. Bai's account of balancing care for fellow citizens with concern for members of other countries thus seems like a plausible understanding of the Confucian view.

At the same time, the tension between special obligations and care for strangers is strong enough that it leads Bai at one point to question whether this view can be called cosmopolitan.¹² To better understand the philosophical implications of the Confucian view, I want to turn to a contemporary account of cosmopolitanism given by Scheffler.

2. SCHEFFLER ON MODERATE COSMOPOLITANISM

We can start by considering Scheffler's distinction between extreme and moderate cosmopolitanism. Scheffler follows Nussbaum in assuming that cosmopolitanism means having a responsibility "to the worldwide community of human beings."¹³ Nonetheless, he points out that there is an ambiguity regarding how the cosmopolitan understands their special obligations. In the strict version, favored by Nussbaum, our interpersonal relationships and group memberships have no special status, but are significant only insofar as they serve the interests of world citizenship. In the moderate version, being a world citizen is "one important form of membership among others, one important source of reasons and responsibilities among others."¹⁴ On this view, members of a particular society have responsibilities to one another that they do not have to outsiders.

Because of the Confucian conception of differential love highlighted by both Ivanhoe and Bai, it seems straightforward to understand Confucianism as a version of moderate cosmopolitanism. Like Ivanhoe, Scheffler maintains that one advantage of the moderate position is that it does justice to the idea of special obligations. As he argues, "the conviction that we have special responsibilities to our families, friends, and communities is so deeply embedded within commonsense moral thought

that even to call attention to it is to risk belaboring the obvious."¹⁵ At the same time, the moderate position strikes a balance between extreme cosmopolitans like Nussbaum, who contend that our only obligations arise from being a citizen of the world, and communitarians such as Alasdair MacIntyre, who argue that cosmopolitan values are incompatible with national communal solidarity.¹⁶

However, Scheffler raises some difficulties for the moderate cosmopolitan view. One issue is that there is a tradeoff between special obligations and cosmopolitan concerns, where focusing on one can lead to the neglect of the other. The strict cosmopolitan, Scheffler notes, will argue that when citizens of richer countries focus on their own family and friends and fellow citizens, the result is an increase in global inequality, with the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer.¹⁷ While he maintains that it is possible for a society to accommodate both sets of values, he says that it is challenging to identify and implement principles that reflect both. "On the contrary," he writes, "it is likely to require considerable social imagination and ingenuity, psychological sophistication and sensitivity, and political determination and skill."¹⁸ As we have seen from Bai's discussion of refugees, the Confucian position also appears to commit us to this kind of tradeoff. And as Bai likewise acknowledges, it is difficult to see how the Confucian view will accommodate such cases.

One dimension of the problem consists in identifying cosmopolitan norms that would be continuous with the specific norms of the community. With a given community, Scheffler notes, there is an "infrastructure of responsibility" that sets the expectations for how individuals are supposed to interact with others: a "framework within which those responsibilities may be discharged, as well as a set of mechanisms, often of considerable psychological sophistication, which serve to nurture and support the motivations that individuals must have if they are reliably to fulfil their responsibilities."¹⁹ The community lets us know, in short, which obligations should matter most to us and why. The problem is that once we move to the cosmopolitan arena, it is unclear which norms should govern one's interactions. How do I interact with someone when we share little else in common apart from the fact we belong to the same world? Scheffler writes that the cosmopolitan faces "the danger of moral isolation—of being cut off from the forms of social support that structure and sustain individual responsibility."²⁰

With its focus on specific familial relationships, Confucianism would appear to face a strong version of this challenge. On one understanding, Confucian ethics itself is a kind of "role ethics" in which one's identity and obligations cannot be understood outside of roles such as father, son, brother, and teacher. As David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames put it, the roles "are constitutive of what one in fact is. In the absence of the performance of these roles, nothing constituting a coherent personality remains: no soul, no mind, no ego, not even an 'I-know-not-what.'"²¹ While not all scholars share this interpretation, there is agreement that immediate familial roles are the most important mechanism through which members of a Confucian society learn respect and sympathy for people in general.

We can also express the challenge in terms of the notion of brotherhood that is at stake in Ivanhoe's account of Confucian cosmopolitanism mentioned in the previous section. Early Confucian texts lay out specific norms for how brothers should treat one another, such as deference on the part of younger brothers and gentleness on the part of older ones. Yet these norms, we should note, concern treatment of one's *actual* brothers, not one's brothers in the cosmopolitan sense. The important distinction between these two kinds of brother is that one's concern for one's actual brother is more central. Mencius thinks it is obvious, for instance, that a man will care more for his brother's child than he will for the child of a neighbor.²²

In another passage, someone asks Mencius why the sage-king Shun punished ministers who were corrupt, yet put his brother Xiang, who was trying to kill Shun himself, in charge of the territory of Youbi. Mencius's response is to defend Shun:

Benevolent people do not store up anger nor do they dwell in bitterness against their younger brothers. They simply love and treat them as kin. Treating them as kin, they desire them to have rank. He gave him Youbi to administer to give him wealth and rank. If he himself was the Son of Heaven, and his younger brother was a common fellow, could this be called loving and treating him as kin?²³

Mencius explains further how Xiang did not have any power in the state, with other officials taking care of its actual administration, so that his placement there is sometimes referred to as "banishment." At the same time, he says that Shun still wanted to see him, and Xiang often came to his court to visit. Here Shun appears to put his consideration for his brother above his duties as ruler.²⁴

For this reason, the injunction to treat everyone in the four seas as a brother is not as clear as it first appears. Given the Confucian emphasis on differential love, the qualification "but not as one's *actual* brother" must be added. This qualification undercuts the most important feature of the brother norm—that one is willing to put one's brother above all else—in the case of one's cosmopolitan brothers. On the other hand, the norms that should sustain one's interactions with one's brothers-within-the-Four-Seas is left unspecified.

In cases where there is a conflict between caring for one's inner circle and caring for outsiders, Bai seems correct in concluding that the Confucian tradition does not seem to possess an easy solution. The challenge for Confucian cosmopolitanism, then, is to provide an account of cosmopolitan norms such that these norms are *continuous* with the familial and communal norms that provide the structure of the society envisioned by Confucian thinkers. I want now to consider some possibilities drawn from particular roles that have been important in the Confucian tradition.

3. CONFUCIAN ROLES AND COSMOPOLITAN NORMS

A first norm is one mentioned by Ivanhoe in his account: the role of guest. Ivanhoe argues that a Confucian cosmopolitan is "not a citizen of nowhere" but instead "an interested guest or visitor of various cultures and ways of life who is comfortable around the world."²⁵ He quotes *Analects* 3.15, in which Confucius, upon entering the ancestral temple, asks questions about everything there. Ivanhoe takes the passage to indicate Confucius showing "considerable humility"; even though he himself is an expert in ritual, he knows that it is important to listen to others. He also shows the art of developing connections with the people in the temple, by showing he cares about what they care about and engaging them "in an agreeable and humane way."²⁶ In this passage, Confucius models values that people living today should strive to display, embodying the "rituals of inquiry" that show respect for the beliefs and practices of people who are different from us.²⁷

Ivanhoe uses this passage to develop a view of the cosmopolitan as *ideal visitor or guest*: "someone who comes to another's country, temple, home, or life with an attitude of open curiosity, a characteristically Confucian 'love of learning' (好學), and a desire for and anticipation of experiences that will deepen not only their knowledge about but appreciation of what it is to be human."²⁸ Rather than showing respect for an abstract notion of moral agency that people share in common, Ivanhoe's cosmopolitan is drawn to "complex expressions of value and meaning instantiated in actual traditions and cultures and how they hang together to constitute particular forms of life."²⁹ Such a person sets aside the norms of their own culture and defers judgment, using sympathetic imagination in order to understand the beliefs or practices in question.

Ivanhoe does not say as much about the role of host, mentioning it only briefly in a footnote, though he does take this role as well to be an aspect of Confucian cosmopolitanism. As with the role of guest, being a good host will involve displaying certain values that allow one to relate to people from other cultures in the appropriate way. "Among other virtues," Ivanhoe writes, "a cultural host will need to have patience, forbearance, enthusiasm, and creativity in order to welcome, educate, and edify guests."³⁰

To fill out the account of this role a bit, we can consider a depiction of Confucius playing the role of host found in the *Analects*:

When called on by his lord to receive a guest, his countenance would become alert and serious, and he would hasten his steps. When he saluted those in attendance beside him—extending his clasped hands to the left or right, as their position required—his robes remained perfectly arrayed, both front and back. Hastening forward, he moved smoothly, as though gliding upon wings. Once the guest had left, he would always return to report, "The guest is no longer looking back."³¹

This text shows the seriousness with which Confucius approaches the role of host as well as his tactfulness in

carrying it out. Another passage in the *Analects* offers a brief account of Confucius's hosting of a blind music master, highlighting the care and gracefulness with which he puts his guest at ease.³²

One strength of the host or guest role is that it does not suffer from a discontinuity when we apply these roles to people outside of our immediate group. In fact, a virtue of these roles is that they provide norms precisely for our interactions with people who are not members of our inner circle. With respect to our parents and siblings themselves, the role of host or guest does not appear to have much meaning.

A limit of the guest- (and host-) based view, however, is that it applies only in specifically defined situations when one is placed in the role of host or guest. If a scholar of Chinese philosophy is visiting my university, for instance, my department might designate me as the host, with all the obligations it entails: making sure that person has adequate lodging, transportation, food, and so on. But if there are visitors to my university with whom I lack this scholarly connection, the obligations are much thinner. If I see them on campus and they look like they need help, then of course I will try to help them; but otherwise, I have little to do with them. The same goes for the role of guest: I do not act like a guest to every stranger that I meet, but only in specific situations when I am playing the role of guest.

Another possibility is to base cosmopolitan care on norms of friendship. The opening passage of the *Analects* discusses the joy of friends arriving from afar.³³ Other passages recommend friendship as a means of self-improvement that helps us to "sharpen our tools" in the pursuit of becoming good.³⁴ The early Confucians appear to have an account of virtuous friendship that is similar to the account given by Aristotle.³⁵ As Mencius says, "One does not become someone's friend by presuming upon one's age or social status or family relationship. One befriends the Virtue (*de* 德) of another person."³⁶ The process of making friends with someone shows these differences to be incidental.

Mencius thinks that even boundaries of geographic region and time period should not get in the way of establishing friendship with others:

If you are one of the finest nobles in a village, then befriend the other fine nobles of that village. If you are one of the finest nobles in a state, then befriend the other fine nobles of that state. If you are one of the finest nobles in the world, then befriend the other fine nobles of the world. If befriend the other fine nobles of the world is still not enough, then ascend to examine the ancients.³⁷

Such passages offer a basis for thinking of friendship as a cosmopolitan virtue. Following Mencius's reasoning, we can argue that expanding our circle of friends beyond people in our own village gives us access to a larger group from which to select the best possible people. If we stay within the limits of our own village, on the other hand, then the friendships we develop will be confined within the

limits of our own circumstances. For this reason, the role of friend, like that of host or a guest, is a potential resource in the Confucian tradition for deriving cosmopolitan norms. In interacting with people from other cultures, we think of how the relationships of friendship that we develop with them can provide opportunities for our own personal development.

The limitation of the role of friend, however, is similar to that of host and guest. If we view someone as our friend or a potential friend, then we are likely to act in light of the associated norms. However, if we do not see the role of friend as applicable, either because the person is too different in age, or occupation, or ideology, then the norms of friendship will not shape our behavior. Roles like host, guest, and friend can perhaps guide some of our interactions with those outside of our group, but they fall short of providing a model for how we are to engage with others simply by virtue of our being fellow citizens of the world.

4. CONCLUSION

At the end of his essay, "Ethics of Cosmopolitanism: The Confucian Tradition," Karl-Heinz Pohl writes:

[A]lthough Confucian ethics in its modern form has gone through and changed with the encounter of Western philosophy, it has not experienced a process of abstraction comparable to Western ethics (culminating today in discourse ethics and ethics of rights). It has remained, by and large, a holistic and socially based role and virtue ethics, i.e., seeing human beings not isolated but in contexts of relationships. . . .³⁸

Some of these relationships, Pohl continues, relate us to the whole of humanity, such as the dictum in *Analects* 12.5 to treat everyone within the Four Seas as a brother. And, for this reason, we can think of Confucianism as a cosmopolitan ethic.

In this paper, I have argued that the Confucian view is especially susceptible to a problem that arises for moderate forms of cosmopolitanism, which attempt to balance our status as citizens of the world with special obligations to our own family and friends and community members. When cut off from the particular roles that structure one's interactions within the family and community, it is difficult to understand one's obligations towards one's fellow citizens of the world.

I have argued that some roles that are important in the Confucian tradition, such as that of brother, have a difficulty in serving as the basis of cosmopolitan norms. If being a brother entails that I have special obligations to those who are my siblings, then it is a challenge to see how I can be a brother to "everyone within the four seas." Other roles, such as host or guest, as well as that of friend, seem more capable of being extended to interactions with outsiders. Yet even these latter roles face difficulty, in that they may not extend to people outside of contexts in which these roles are relevant.

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NOTES

1. Sor-hoon Tan, “Cosmopolitan Confucian Cultures: Suggestions for Future Research and Practice,” *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 2 (2015): 170–71.
2. Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 1 (2014): 37.
3. *Analects* 12.5. Translations of passages from the *Analects* and the *Mencius* are from *Confucius: Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Hackett, 2003) and *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Hackett, 2008).
4. *Mengzi* 7A45.
5. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 32.
6. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 40.
7. Tongdong Bai, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 175.
8. Bai, *Against Political Equality*, 176.
9. Bai, *Against Political Equality*, 178.
10. Bai, *Against Political Equality*, 203–204.
11. Bai, *Against Political Equality*, 206.
12. Bai, *Against Political Equality*, 204. While Bai is concerned with political cosmopolitanism, because he thinks the same structure that governs conflicts between one’s own state and other states also holds for conflicts between one’s family and one’s state, the question can also be applied to humanistic cosmopolitanism mentioned by Ivanhoe.
13. Samuel Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and Responsibility in Liberal Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 113; Martha C. Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Beacon Press, 1996), 4.
14. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 114.
15. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 117.
16. See Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 117–18. For MacIntyre’s view, see his Lindley Lecture, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?* (University of Kansas Press, 1984).
17. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 119.
18. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 123.
19. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 124.
20. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 124.
21. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, “A Pragmatic Understanding of Confucian Democracy,” in *Confucianism for the Modern World*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Hahm Chaibong (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 136.
22. *Mengzi* 3A5.
23. *Mengzi* 5A3.
24. In the mid-2000s, Liu Qingping started a lengthy debate by arguing that the Confucian weight on such obligations leads to corruption. With this passage in particular, Liu argues that Shun is prioritizing affection for his brother over the welfare of the people of Youbi. That Confucius and Mencius sanction these actions shows that they endorse filial piety, or “kinship love for one’s relatives,” at the expense of *ren*, or “humane love for other people in general.” In spite of an emphasis on benevolent government and moral uprightness, thinkers like Confucius and Mencius are led to favor actions that put private interest over the public good. See Liu Qingping, “Confucianism and Corruption:

An Analysis of Shun’s Two Actions Described by *Mencius*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2007): 1–19.

25. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 34.
26. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 35.
27. Ironically, some traditional commentators have seen Confucius’s asking questions in *Analects* 3.15 as a subtle means of expressing his own judgment. See, for instance, *Confucius: Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland, 23. In a previous passage (*Analects* 3.10), Confucius appears to criticize the manner in which the ancestral sacrifice takes place. If we follow this interpretation, the message is not about being a respectful guest, but rather about how to criticize others in ways that are not too obvious but hopefully they will come to understand in the end.
28. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 35–36.
29. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 36.
30. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Cosmopolitanism,” 40, n. 27.
31. *Analects* 10.3.
32. *Analects* 15.42.
33. *Analects* 1.1.
34. *Analects* 15.10.
35. See Tim Connolly, “Friendship and Filial Piety: Relational Ethics in Aristotle and Early Confucianism,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (2012): 71–88.
36. *Mengzi* 5B3.
37. *Mengzi* 5B8.
38. Karl-Heinz Pohl, “Ethics of Cosmopolitanism: The Confucian Tradition,” in *Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Towards Planetary Transformations*, ed. Ananta Kumar Giri (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 117.

The Radical Possibilities of Forced Cosmopolitanism

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ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between Asian American philosophy and the classical Asian philosophies? In particular, how might an Asian American philosopher, one who takes on that anti-racist and anti-imperialist political identity, approach the classical Asian philosophies, which are bound up in various ways with forms of oppression and empire? For the Asian American philosopher, this is an existential question, one of practical identity, not merely a theoretical one. I argue in this paper for a particular kind of methodological cosmopolitanism: creolization. Creolization is a recontextualist interpretive methodology that draws together and mutually transforms traditions that coexist in conditions of rupture, antagonism, and unequal power relations for the purposes of addressing the problems people currently face. Creolizing the classical traditions recognizes the unhomey position of the Asian American philosopher as a “forced cosmopolitan” in the midst of American empire.

This essay considers how second (and later) generation Asian Americans, living in the midst of US empire and thereby placed in a position of what I will call “forced cosmopolitanism,” might approach the classical Asian philosophical traditions, bound up as they are with histories of imperialism and oppression. I will argue for a *creolizing* approach to these traditions that looks to find radical anti-imperialist possibilities in those traditions and histories.

One initial way into the dialectic that I will pursue is to consider the name of the APA committee that organized this session: the Committee for Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies. It must be admitted that the name is a bit of a mouthful. The other APA “diversity” or affinity-based committees don’t have this problem: “Hispanics/Latinxs,” “LGBT Philosophers,” . . . even as they all arose as part of the “diversity” push within the APA and other North American professional philosophical associations at the end of the 1990s.¹ Yet the mouthful, wordy as it is, expresses the full extent of the Committee’s remit as it was imagined (in no small part due to contestation and not just as a matter of automatic “inclusion”) at its inception, and also expresses the *separation* between those distinct parts of the remit that was built into the philosophical situation at that time.²

Indeed, the addition of Asian American philosophers and philosophies to the remit and the recognition of the distinct philosophical place of Asian America was due to the vocal advocacy of a few, including, at the start, Gary Mar and Yoko Arisaka.³ Its continuation—to the extent that there was a continuation—was due to people like David H. Kim, Emily S. Lee, Falguni Sheth, and Saba Fatima.⁴ In a real sense Asian American philosophy *exists* as an institutional category (to the extent that it does) due to the work of these philosophers in keeping it in view. Kim gives voice to the role of naming in developing a critical mass of people interested in Asian American philosophy in the second issue of the Committee’s *Newsletter*, which had a section devoted to Asian American philosophy and philosophers. He writes there that “philosophy of the Asian American experience (we might call it ‘Asian American philosophy’) is virtually non-existent.”⁵ This claim could not have been made about classical Asian philosophy at that time, even though the exclusion of those philosophical traditions from the center of the profession in North America was (and is) real and serious.

Even the scope of “Asian” philosophy and philosophers at the inception of the Committee (is it just East Asian philosophy? Is it just Confucianism? Just Chinese and Japanese philosophers?) was not as clear or obvious as a matter of literal meaning as it may (perhaps falsely—what about Indonesian philosophy? Vietnamese philosophy?) appear to some of us in the present. These considerations taken together raise the question of the *meaning* of the different parts of the Committee’s title. Given their linguistic separation in that title, which accurately reflects the historical and sociological separation of their referents, these considerations also raise the question of how these different parts relate to one another.

Let me be a bit less historical and a bit more explicit. To be “Asian”—i.e., to have been born in or to have ethnic heritage from one of the countries on the Asian continent—is different from being “Asian American.” This is so not just because of one’s geographical location, but because of the different issues faced by these groups with regard to the “mainstream” of the profession. For example, Asian American philosophers may not face the same linguistic injustices as some Asian philosophers. There are both Asian and Asian American philosophers who do not study Asian (or Asian American) philosophies, and those who study the philosophies need not themselves be part of either of those identity groups. So much is obvious. But these categories are not exclusive, and so the Committee’s title also challenges us to examine the *relation* between *both* sets of distinctions: the relation between belonging to particular identity groups and working in or on particular philosophical traditions. Taking up the challenge posed by the Committee’s title, I want to examine the relationship between being an Asian American philosopher and working on (in some form or other) the classical Asian philosophies.⁶

1. POSITIONALITY

What do I mean by being an “Asian American philosopher,” in this context? By “Asian American,” I mean a *political* identity that arises from and can be explicitly adopted on the basis of certain experiences of being racialized as “Asian” in North America. And by “Asian American philosophy,” I mean the theorization of those racialized experiences and of the political problems and issues to which those experiences give expression. In this I follow David H. Kim’s conception of Asian American philosophy as that arising from experiences of Asian America shaped by the histories of North America’s imperialist excursions westward into the Pacific as well as the migration of people, ideas, cultures, technologies, etc. in the reverse direction, eastward across the Pacific.⁷

“Asian American” was a political identity from its inception.⁸ The first wave of Asian American studies was formed in the heady days of the late 1960s as part of the Third Worldist movements in Californian universities. It drew liberally on and developed alongside the Black Power, Chicana/o, and American Indian movements to interrogate and resist US imperialism and US neocolonialism. The goal was a deepened form of South-South solidarity and understanding to address what W. E. B. Du Bois called “the problem of the twentieth century”—the global problem of the color line.⁹ The umbrella term “Asian American” was intended to express not only a pan-Asian and pan-ethnic anti-imperialist political identity, but also solidarity with other anti-imperial struggles in the Global South.¹⁰

Though these radical beginnings were, over time, co-opted into the separatist and “diversity/affinity”-based “ethnic studies” programs that now are the institutional addendum to the “older” and (supposedly) non-identitarian humanistic and social scientific disciplines, this political meaning of Asian American identity remains. It is true that an Asian American *cultural* identity also exists and is in constant process of becoming, located around food, family, music, cultural icons, certain (relatively) common religious and ethnic practices and traditions, and other cultural objects.

But what I want to insist on is that alongside—indeed prior to—this cultural identity exists an Asian American political identity. To identify as *Asian American* in this political sense is to take on and to find meaning in one’s racialized identity within and against American empire. It is to begin with the experience of being subjected to racialization and to reclaim that racial identity, to give it meaning *other* than as the object of oppression and discrimination.

A central part of that racialized identity, as Claire Jean Kim, Gary Y. Okihiro, and others have argued, is the construction of Asianness in the US context as “permanently foreign.”¹¹ Experientially, this manifests (among other things) as a sense of not-quite-belonging, a search for the meaning of “home.” Exclusion on the basis of this constructed “foreignness” is one reason why assimilation, for Asian Americans, is both so desired and so impossible. It is desired because one’s racial identity is that which is not-assimilated, culturally Other. And it is impossible precisely because one is constructed in that way.

The second generation of which I am a part, and later generations, I suggest, feel this desirability and impossibility particularly keenly. The impossibility of assimilation, while no doubt felt by the first generation, was coupled with a hope that later generations (those who spoke the right way, who ate the right foods, who went to the right schools) *could* successfully assimilate. The impossibility would be overcome, and thus the goal of assimilation handed down. Yet if anything the impossibility of assimilation is felt more strongly by the second generation and thus perhaps repressed even more deeply. For we *have* “done the right things” (some of us and some of the “right things,” anyway). And *still*, this society is not and seemingly cannot be fully one’s own.

This realization of the continuing impossibility of assimilation may and should also problematize the *desirability* of assimilation. To assimilate would be to take one’s position in the American racial hierarchy. It would be to accept one’s position as a buffer between whites and those darker than one is, to adopt consciously what Mari Matsuda has called the position of “racial bourgeoisie.”¹² Assimilation, understood in this way, is not only descriptively impossible, but normatively undesirable. It involves complicity in the oppression and domination of others through, ironically, submitting oneself to different forms of oppression and domination.

There are other differences (of course, at the level of generalization and tendency—I do not mean to make these universal claims) between the first generation and the second generation. While the first generation had and have some connection to their countries of origin, a “home” in that sense, even if they were more or less permanently “away from home,” the second-generation connection was often more tenuous, fraught with ambivalences and complications. It is a strange and uncanny feeling to “visit” a place (the “homeland”) that feels in some way so familiar yet where one so clearly does not fully belong. “Home” can neither simply be one’s new adopted country, given the impossibility of assimilation, nor can it simply be where “one comes from.” (For those of the second generation

and later who are of multiple races, these ambivalences proliferate.)

The point can be put like this: “Home” is a term, for the second generation, that does not have a clear referent or even a clear *possible* referent. What would it even *be* to have a “home,” when one’s world is in a real sense not one’s own? And this is one of the puzzles for the second-generation migrant: not only what, or where, is “home,” or how does one find “home,” but: what does “home” even mean?

2. COSMOPOLITANISM

The meaning and the value of “home” is a central issue of the literature on cosmopolitanism.¹³ Central to any cosmopolitanism is the idea that one has some commitment to a universal human community beyond that of one’s particularistic attachments to one’s home. A cosmopolitan is, literally, a “citizen of the world.” Moderate forms of cosmopolitanism merely insist that such particularistic attachments must sit alongside and be tempered by universalist commitments. Stricter versions of cosmopolitanism deny any such importance to any “home.” Such attachments, for the strict cosmopolitan, are not only particularistic, but parochial.

Cosmopolitanism, whether moderate or strict, comes in all sorts of varieties, from a broad *moral* cosmopolitanism on which the sphere of moral community is the world, to a kind of *political* cosmopolitanism that insists that a world community requires some global institutional form. The kind of cosmopolitanism—an intellectual and methodological kind—that I want to examine in this essay rests on a form of moral, not political, cosmopolitanism. It does not require any particular global political institutions, other than the (political in a broad sense) global networks of communication and the flows of ideas and people across these networks. Having said that, my cosmopolitanism is political in a larger sense than the narrowly institutional. It is political insofar as it is a response to the capitalist and imperialist world-system built over the last five centuries in which we all live.

By a *methodological* cosmopolitanism, I mean a way of *doing philosophy* in a way that is global. That is, I want to consider these broad existential and cultural questions of “home” that are raised by the earlier considerations in rather narrower terms, of one’s relation to an intellectual or philosophical “home.” In taking cosmopolitanism in this way, I follow Kwame Anthony Appiah’s conception of cosmopolitanism as a form of *conversation* between traditions and ways of life, informed by a normative commitment to respecting with and engaging with other ways of life in their full particularity.¹⁴ Cosmopolitan conversation does not just consist in learning “how others do things.” It requires that one open oneself up to challenges to one’s deep-seated commitments that one may have inherited from one’s “home” tradition. Cosmopolitanism in this sense rests on epistemic humility.¹⁵

Appiah’s cosmopolitanism does not presuppose the possibility of, nor does it aim at agreement on, universal shared values or ideals. It is enough, Appiah thinks, for

cosmopolitan conversation to “help people get used to one another.”¹⁶ That is, while Appiah’s cosmopolitanism rests on a notion of universal moral community, it is also *pluralistic* in spirit. It is one of the “moderate” forms of cosmopolitanism that insists that there is a value to “home,” to rootedness and partiality, while insisting that there may be different homes for different people.

Such cosmopolitanism is appealing to someone in the position of a second-generation migrant. It accepts the value of “home” as something held or sought while finding value in being in-between, finding spaces between and amidst different traditions.¹⁷ The migrant is already in-between, already crosses different ways of life. Yet there are significant differences: cosmopolitanism, in Appiah’s sense, is a methodological *choice*. It is a commitment that one can affirm or deny, or at least a challenge that one can take up or refuse to take up.¹⁸ But the migrant does not have that choice. The migrant is a *forced* cosmopolitan, one who *must* converse across traditions.¹⁹ The migrant does so not just out of intellectual curiosity and a (rightful) commitment to understanding, respecting, and engaging with different ways of being human. They *must* do so to live in a world which is not (yet, fully) theirs.

This difference in attitude and motivation shapes what cosmopolitan engagement with the classical Asian traditions might mean and the form that it might take. What such engagement might mean is not just a contribution to understanding, but something more existential: a kind of self-understanding, a recovery of something that might be called a “home.” If the project is not merely the theoretical one of increasing understanding, but the practical one of self-understanding, then the ideas and concepts that one encounters are not simply objects to study, but practices to adopt and to make part of one’s way of engaging with the world.²⁰

Put another way, the normative commitment at the heart of Appiah’s cosmopolitanism motivates some worthy intellectual practices, like diversification of the canon, the telling of new and different narratives of the histories of philosophy, and the important comparativist work of bringing different traditions into a common space of discussion. And it does so, at least when done well, without the kind of intellectual imperialism that consists in (intentionally or unintentionally) subsuming the fundamental tenets and frameworks of one tradition to those of another.²¹ By contrast, the fundamental commitment at the heart of the migrant’s approach to the classical traditions is to making sense of oneself and one’s place in the world. In particular, for one who has adopted Asian Americanness as a political identity, that form of self-understanding is informed by the anti-imperialist commitment central to that political identity. These two facts might motivate a different approach to these texts and theories.

That possibility becomes actual given the fact that the classical Asian philosophical traditions, in various forms, in various places and at various times, have been put to the service of imperialist ends.²² Confucian conceptions of human nature and of the role of culture, education, and knowledge have been put to elitist and civilizationalist

purposes. The division of labor within a larger whole central to Hinduism undergirds ongoing caste oppression and domination. Doctrines of Buddhist exceptionalism have played and continue to play a role in anti-Muslim and anti-Christian violence in parts of Southeast Asia, not to mention Japanese imperialism in Asia. Daoist holisms form a part of Chinese nationalist narratives through their incorporation into various national martial arts. All these are forms of the “return” to ancient traditions that was a central part of various Asian nationalisms and civilizationalist discourse from the late nineteenth century to the present.

For the cosmopolitan who is concerned just with bringing different traditions into conversation, these aspects of the classical traditions are just another part of those traditions to be studied in order to understand more deeply the contexts in which those ideas and practices were developed. But for the Asian American migrant engaging themselves in a kind of “return” to “home,” one that is part of the taking up of an anti-imperialist political identity, this imbrication of the traditions in these imperialist projects is a problem of practical identity to be confronted. What is it to seek a kind of home in these traditions, if they are themselves so bound up in imperialist projects?

3. METHOD

Cosmopolitanism in Appiah’s sense of a conversation between traditions is *non-imperialist*, in the sense that the conversation should take each tradition on its own terms and not read any one tradition through the terms of another.²³ One way of embodying this non-imperialism is via a contextualist historical method. We should read texts in their own context, in light of the concerns and problems of that temporal and geographical period.²⁴ Doing so is a prophylactic principle against intellectual imperialism. It stands in the way of the scholar imposing some other worldview on those texts.

This contextualist interpretive methodology supports the achievement of many of the metaphilosophical goals of cosmopolitan conversation. If we truly want to diversify the canon, it is important that we don’t do so merely in the surface sense of including (for example) “utilitarian” texts from the Warring States period in China, or “skeptical” texts from the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Diversification is not just the repetition of the same theoretical views with different colored faces, as if to say: “look, they can do it too.” The telling of new narratives of the histories of philosophy is a process of giving context to the texts and figures that comprise the matter of those histories. And comparative work should take seriously the different contexts in which the theories or concepts are to be compared.

But the *non-imperialism* embodied in Appiah’s cosmopolitanism is not yet *anti-imperialist* in the sense that what is learned from the relevant traditions is useful in the struggle *against* imperialism, both political and cultural. Indeed, as I have suggested, it may be (as it is for figures like John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, for example) that a fully contextualist interpretation of classical texts and figures shows that such texts *contributed to or at least were justifications for* various forms of imperialism. So while contextualism is a defense against a kind of *philosophical*

imperialism, it is not necessarily a tool for *resisting* or *rectifying* existing forms of *political* imperialism like the North American sort of which Asian American identity is a partial product.

(Of course, I don't mean to suggest that doing philosophical work *by itself* is sufficient for political change or even that it necessarily is a form of resistance or a means of change. But insofar as resistance involves the creation of forms of identity—like Asian American identity—that can foster practical solidarity and build community, motivate political action, help diagnose the sources and forms of various forms of injustice and unfreedom, and generate and help instantiate ways of being with others that embody a different set of values to the ones that currently pervade social life, philosophy that aids in the process of self-understanding and identity formation can be part of the project of change.)

So what is to be done?

I propose the adoption of another way of approaching the classical Asian traditions: *creolization*. Let me spell out what I mean by “creolization” before turning to how we might think of its relationship with contextualism. I will argue that creolization can be usefully informed by contextualism, though creolization does not necessarily depend on contextualism. Contextualism can be a starting point on which creolization builds.

“Creolization” has a number of different meanings and uses in different contexts. I will use the term in the sense given to it by the political theorist Jane Anna Gordon.²⁵ Gordon uses the term both descriptively and normatively.

Descriptively, “creolization” refers to the development of new perspectives and practices under conditions of “dependency, antagonism, intimate and complex interpenetration.”²⁶ The parties who engage in creolization are not in positions of political or cultural equality. Gordon's key example is Fanon's creolization of Rousseauian themes. Creolizing interpretation is not bound by principles of reproductive faithfulness to ordinary contexts. Instead, it proceeds through “recontextualization,” “reinvention, resituating, and mistranslation.”²⁷ These practices of re-reading are necessary for dealing with problems that arise in “contexts of radical historical rupture” like the colonial encounter.²⁸

Normatively, creolization describes the generative potential for mutual transformation that may arise from taking such cases of descriptive creolization as a “methodological orientation toward the . . . future.”²⁹ Creolization involves taking an *active* and *creative* attitude toward traditions and texts. It values the “illicit blendings” that arise in conditions of radical confrontation between cultures and traditions.³⁰ It values them because they are attempts to create genuinely new ways of thinking that can help us deal with the problems of *our* time and place. Creolization resists treating cultures or traditions as bearers of purity or authenticity such that departing from their original meanings is impure or inauthentic. For Gordon, creolization is *anti-imperialist* in the sense that it is a methodology adopted by those subject

to the colonial and imperial encounter, those seeking to recreate their own histories and traditions in ways that help them resist imperialism.³¹

Asian American identity is constitutively creolized. As I mentioned earlier, the Asian American movement of the 1960s, including the Red Guard Party and the Yellow Panthers, drew on Black Power analyses of the nature of US racial capitalism (which in turn, drawing on anti-colonial critiques of US imperialism abroad, developed the idea of “internal colonialism” to describe the position of blacks in the US).³² Like the Black Power movement, the Asian American movement looked to Third World Marxisms overseas as theoretical inspiration. Not only Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, but also Ernesto “Che” Guevara, Fidel Castro, Kwame Nkrumah, and Amílcar Cabral were the guiding lights of this movement. All of these Third World Marxisms sought to adopt Marxism to their specific contexts, itself a form of creolization. And part of their creative adoption of Marxism to those contexts involved attention to the need to form *cultural* identities that could support the political anti-imperialist project. Cultural identity follows politics, rather than the other way around.

Creolization is characteristic not only of Asian American political identity but also Asian American cultural identity. One of the marks of Asian American cultural identity, Lisa Lowe argued nearly thirty years ago, is “hybridity.” Lowe means by this term “the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations.” Lowe's use of “hybridity” is akin to the descriptive use of creolization to mark “the history of survival [of these cultural identities] within relationships of unequal power and domination.”³³ Lowe focuses on uneven power relations between immigrant groups and the dominant white culture, but (as she and others point out) an equally important form of hybridity in the formation of a panethnic identity like “Asian American” is the relaxation of previously strict boundaries between ethnic groups, especially given the history of antagonistic relationships between ethnic homelands. The overcoming (at least to some degree) of these antagonisms was a political *achievement*, done in pursuit of the *normative* commitment of creolization: to forge new identities and ways of being that can help address contemporary problems, like the common racialization of different ethnicities as “Asian” by white culture and by the US state, through means of the census, welfare classifications, immigrant labor classifications and so on.³⁴

Creolization in both descriptive and normative senses is thus part and parcel of Asian American identity. But what does this mean for the *particular* project of finding a “home” in the classical Asian philosophical traditions? And what might creolization look like applied to those traditions?

The first thing that follows is that the verb of which “home” is the object matters. “Home” is not to be *found*, as if the classical traditions were *already* a home that needed just to be sought and recovered, but to be (*re*)*created*. That is to say that the object of approaching those traditions is not just to understand them in their particularity, but to see what in them might be adapted as part of new ways of thinking and

being in a new political and social context. The traditions are neither sacred objects that are to be maintained in their purity, nor simply objects of understanding, but potentials to be explored, drawn on, and cast aside where necessary.

For this purpose, a deep contextualist understanding of the texts in their originary historical milieux is of course helpful, but—I want to insist—not strictly speaking necessary. Contextualism can be a useful starting point for a creolizing approach. A knowledge of originary contexts can help us understand the potentials that certain concepts or practices have, or how and why a certain set of concepts or practices fit together into a whole in light of the problems and questions against which they were developed.³⁵ But contextualism cannot of itself determine how we, here and now, take up those concepts and practices and give them new life in light of our present situation and present purposes. Of course, philosophers should not actively ignore the history of ideas. But neither is our enterprise exhausted by recounting those histories. We should leave—and make—room for play, for concepts and practices that we might in a different voice say are (merely) “inspired by” traditions, or that “resonate” with them, or that gain meaning by being placed alongside them.

However, I also want to insist, more strongly, that it is *possible*—though I leave open the question of whether, and if so under what circumstances, it is ever *preferable*—for interpretation of traditional texts and practices to have a purpose and to have meaning even in the absence of any depth of contextualist understanding. Many traditional practices have travelled with migrants and refugees, many of whom may not have had any deep theoretical understanding of the originary contexts of those practices, far from any contexts in which their original meanings made sense. Yet the maintenance and the ongoing evolution of those traditions gave those migrants and refugees meaning and purpose in new lands. Those traditions remained what they were by becoming something new.³⁶ What is true of folk traditions may be true also of philosophical traditions.

I want to insist on this possibility for two reasons. The first is because it is a situation some (younger) philosophers, especially those trained in the Anglo-American imperial center, might find themselves in. They may have some background familiarity with (say) Confucian or Buddhist concepts and commitments, conveyed via cultural osmosis, without any real sense of the debates and histories and questions of transmission and influence. Yet from such sprouts may develop fresh plants. There are already enough difficulties, institutional and intellectual, facing the new generation of philosophers who would like to do interesting work without adding further demands of “expertise.” Praise be to the dilettante.

The second is that it averts a danger that Frantz Fanon identified for the decolonial intellectual.³⁷ One (perhaps necessary) temptation for the decolonial intellectual, Fanon thought, was to delve into the only thing left untouched by colonialism: the precolonial past. Yet this reclamation of past cultural glories, Fanon argued, actually separated the intellectual from the present struggle for liberation which is the actual source of culture. The task of the intellectual

in the struggle, Fanon argued, was to open up possibilities for the future, not to dwell on things past. And this opening up required an insistent focus on what is, not on what is no longer.

4. TWO DANGERS

This call for creolization—especially the stronger proposal, delinked or actively set free from contextualism—is of course not without its dangers. I conclude here by responding to two.

The first danger is the possibility of an unintentional imperialism that one can call “filling empty bottles with familiar wine.” If one lets go of the distinctive contexts in which the classical traditions were devised, left with just the concepts and texts that are part of a tradition, what is to stop one from reading one’s existing present frameworks (or their direct opposite, as Fanon argued the Negritude movement did) into those concepts and texts?

The second danger is that without contextualism one may overestimate the novelty of one’s creolized interpretations.³⁸ One may just be repeating what has come before. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned, after all, to repeat it.

These two dangers ought to be taken seriously. They are good reasons for the contextualist turn in the history of philosophy. But let me, at least for the sake of argument, consider what might be said in response to them without going down the contextualist-historicist route. Both dangers arise because of a lack of an independent object against which to measure one’s thinking. They are both dangers of falling into mere subjectivity, into the fantasies of the present. Perhaps there is a way of regaining some kind of objectivity (in the sense of a bulwark against mere subjectivity) without an appeal to historical context?

I think there are two ways in which a modicum of objectivity can be reclaimed. The first is to take the object of interpretation not as singular concepts (say, “suffering” or “awakening” in Buddhist traditions, or “humaneness” in Confucianism) but *webs* of concepts.³⁹ The relations between concepts act as an interpretive constraint, making more difficult (though, of course, not impossible) one-to-one substitution of conceptual meanings from one’s own dominant framework. Even if all one has are empty bottles, the relationships that hold between the bottles constrains what one can put into them. For example, Kwong-loi Shun argues that the Confucian concept of *jing* cannot simply be translated as “respect” for the dignity of persons, because the latter concept of “dignity” has no parallel in the Confucian framework.⁴⁰

Paying attention to webs of concepts resists the first danger. The second can be alleviated because the purpose of creolization is not novelty or distinctness for its own sake, but to illuminate and help address the problems of the present, particularly those raised by the global imperial world order. Walter Benjamin’s metaphor of a “constellation” is helpful here. For Benjamin, there is a possibility of an historical text or object speaking to us not as part of a narrative, a flow that can be thought from the

past to our present, but in the “arrest” of thinking, where thinking “suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions.”⁴¹ There is a possibility of a kind of intuitive grasp of that configuration comprising both that past text and our present, a seeing them together as a “constellation” which illuminates both. The task of the (historical materialist) historian, for Benjamin, is not to recognize history “the way it really was,” but instead to “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger,” for the “past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.”⁴²

This method is radically and explicitly anti-historicist and anti-contextualist. And it is driven to that extreme by a deep pessimism about the extent to which historiography of any kind necessarily tells a victor’s narrative: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism . . . barbarism taints also the manner in which it is transmitted.”⁴³ I don’t want to defend Benjamin’s method here. Nor do I have the space to flesh it out in the depth it deserves. But I do want to suggest that, despite the obvious methodological concerns one might have, it nonetheless contains possibilities that might not be visible from a contextualist historiographical perspective.

5. RADICAL POSSIBILITIES IN TWO BRIEF CASES

Given David H. Kim’s remarks about the “virtual non-existence” of Asian American philosophy, particularly Asian American philosophy that attempts some form of reclamation of the classical Asian philosophies, this paper is somewhat in the vein of a manifesto; a call to the struggle on the theoretical front. I would like, in closing, to call attention to what I take to be two cases of philosophers approaching the classical traditions that are close to the kind of method that I have sketched here. Whether either of the philosophers I cite would agree with me is an open matter. For one thing, neither of them set their work against the background of Asian American experience nor—at least explicitly—against American empire. I hope merely to draw attention to the kind of interpretive work at stake.

The first case is the work of B. R. Ambedkar, the Dalit activist, lawyer, historian, and philosopher. While Ambedkar is obviously not situated in the Asian American context, his work has been taken up by members of the Indian and particularly Dalit diaspora in North America and further creolized with other anti-oppressive traditions of thought, particularly the Black Radical tradition. I take Ambedkar’s approach to Buddhism to be the kind of creolizing that in actual effect sets itself free from contextualism, even as he insists (for a variety of reasons) that his Buddha is the *true*, *real* Buddha.⁴⁴

Ambedkar, a voracious polymath, drew on a wide variety of traditions in his attempt to abolish untouchability and caste oppression, including Dalit and lower-caste literatures, American pragmatism, Buddhism, Marxism, and Romanticism. His “Buddhist Bible”—*The Buddha and His Dhamma*, published posthumously in 1957—reconstructs Buddhism (in its “new vehicle,” or Navayana) as aiming at the abolition of this-worldly social injustice, particularly through Dalit liberation. It places little emphasis on original meaning or contexts or soteriology—indeed,

one of Ambedkar’s main methodological techniques is “rational” reconstruction—and much on the potentials of the “spirit” of Buddhism (and of Gautama as exemplar) for radical transformation of souls and societies in the present. Living with that spirit, Ambedkar argues, may involve recontextualization and reimagination. Ambedkar claims that the Buddha himself

wished His religion not to be encumbered with the dead wood of the past. He wanted that it should remain evergreen and serviceable at all times. That is why He gave liberty to His followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required.⁴⁵

Ambedkar’s own method for rendering Buddhism serviceable in the present was to creolize Buddhism with the aforementioned other traditions, to strip it of what he found to be inessential and indeed contrary to its “true essence,” to allow it to speak to his moment.

While there is a large critical literature charging Ambedkar’s Navayana Buddhism with being revisionist or historically inaccurate, with cherry-picking, my point here in invoking Ambedkar in the context of creolization is to suggest that, from one point of view, those criticisms are inapposite.⁴⁶ Ambedkar reads Buddhist texts for what they can bring to the political problems of his time. He decided to convert (and to convert his followers) to Buddhism and not Islam or Christianity precisely because he saw Buddhism as having radical potential for social transformation, and because Buddhism was autochthonous to India. So Buddhism, for Ambedkar, can also be read as attempt to create “home.” The more relevant danger for Ambedkar’s Buddhism, perhaps more pertinent for other forms of so-called “engaged Buddhism,” is that the politics it espouses and the associated metaphysics end up being far too tame, too bound to a liberal or reformist politics.⁴⁷ But that is a different criticism from the one that sees it as “revisionist” or “heterodox.”⁴⁸

The second, more academic, case is Christine Abigail L. Tan’s recent theorization of “freedom in” in the *Zhuangzi*, particularly drawing on Guo Xiang’s commentary.⁴⁹ “Freedom in,” for Tan, is “a type of freedom that acknowledges the deep importance of dependence in being independent.”⁵⁰ It is a spontaneous freedom of action found in particular situations, in particular relations of dependence on and duty to others, responding to the needs of others and of things. It is to self-realize through “vanishing into” things, to “fit into the reality and rest yourself there.”⁵¹ Through acting in accordance with given situations (one could say, with the *dao* in the particularist sense of that word), looking outward into those situations, one comes to a kind of self-realization, namely an accordance with the *dao* in the larger sense of that word. Insofar as it begins from dependence and from the particularity of situations (including the historical and political situation that the world finds itself in now), this conception of freedom is necessarily a social and a political conception of freedom.⁵² Yet insofar as each person sits in different relations of dependence and finds themselves in different situations calling for different responses, what it is to be free will be, for each person, “distinct and singular.”⁵³

Tan emphasizes the political aspects of her conception of freedom in by setting it against Isaiah Berlin's two conceptions of negative and positive freedom (and, it might be added, though Tan does not do so explicitly, against other conceptions of freedom in the Anglo-American philosophical literature that see themselves as a third option, including republican conceptions of freedom and triadic conceptions of freedom).⁵⁴ In Tan's view, both Sinological and Anglophone readings of Zhuangzi as proposing a conception of freedom have implicitly and unnecessarily bound themselves to Berlin's framework. They are thus pushed to read the *Zhuangzi* as proposing a kind of positive freedom-as-self-realization that consists in a quietist "retreat into the inner citadel," leaving this world untouched.

Tan makes the genealogical critique that Berlin's concepts of freedom are bound to Western, particularly Christian, conceptions of free will. To read that history into the *Zhuangzi* is precisely to engage in imperialist interpretation of the sort criticized earlier. Tan, instead, by beginning with Guo Xiang's commentary, aims to develop a conception of freedom from outside that Western hegemony, one that can play a role in sociomaterial change (indeed, as Tan emphasizes, Guo Xiang was himself a political official during the Jin dynasty), but which does not take as its final goal effecting such change. Instead, Tan argues, "freedom in" sits in an ongoing dialectical relationship with sociomaterial change. It is both its enabling condition and the result of such change:

self-determination is the goal of any sociomaterial change which allows one to self-realize rather than the other way around... Not only is the goal to change sociomaterial conditions, but those conditions must also be changed in order to achieve self-determination, in a dialectical and unending process.⁵⁵

In reading a conception of freedom into the *Zhuangzi*, Tan departs from the originary context of the text, where no such concept was in use. Yet her reading of the *Zhuangzi* through Guo Xiang pays particular attention to the connections between key concepts in Guo Xiang's reading that are constitutive of the conception of freedom: *xiaoyao* (free and easy wandering); *wuxin* (no heart-mind); *zide* (self-realization); *ming* (obscurity, vanishing into); *ziran* (being self-so). Her reading is thus motivated by contemporary philosophical concerns and contexts, particularly those raised by histories of Western imperialism, and brings those concerns and contexts to the text, while being sensitive to the conceptual relationships of the text and the tradition. It thus fits with the two interpretive responses that I earlier sketched in response to the possible dangers of creolization.

It is a little uncouth to end with these two (far too brief) mentions of work that deserve much deeper substantive engagement. But I hope that they give some sense of the scope of interpretive projects in the classical Asian philosophical traditions that might usefully be allied with or, one hopes, in the end come out of, Asian American philosophy as a forced cosmopolitanism.

NOTES

1. See Yoko Arisaka, "Institutional Change through Diversity Initiatives: The Case of Philosophy in the USA," *East Asian Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2022): 153–61; David H. Kim, "Asian American Philosophers: Absence, Politics, and Identity," *APA Newsletter on Asian/Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 1, no. 2 (2001): 25–28. I am grateful to Arisaka and Kim for conversations and reminiscences about the founding of the Committee.
2. For previous discussion of the name of the Committee and "the struggle for inclusion," see Gary Mar, "What Does Asian American Studies Have to Do with Philosophy?" *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 27–30.
3. Arisaka notes that the initial remit of the Committee, as with the other diversity committees, was to advocate for members of the profession "who had personally experienced exclusion in the profession." However, she writes, "it soon became clear that exclusion was not limited to philosophers from Asian countries, but that Asian American philosophers also experienced marginalization. At that point the name of the committee changed to reflect that understanding." Arisaka, "Institutional Change through Diversity Initiatives," 157. For acknowledgment of Mar's role, see Craig K. Ihara and David Haekwon Kim, "Editors' Introduction," *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 23: "It is perhaps fitting that Mar should be the first to formally broach this issue [of Asian American philosophy] because it was through his advocacy that the APA decided to open its doors to issues of concern to Asian American philosophers and philosophies."
4. See also the papers—by Sabeen Ahmed, Saba Fatima, Boram Jeong, and Tamsin Kimoto—presented at the session "On the Uses of the Concept of Asian American Identity" at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the APA Central Division.
5. Kim, "Asian American Philosophers," 27. Unfortunately, this is still more or less the case, as Kim noted twenty years later. See David H. Kim, "Frenemy Philosophy," *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 20, no. 1 (2020): 32: "Now, roughly twenty years after this already late publication, there is still so little in this subfield and so few in the profession . . . identify as Asian American, unlike what we find in counterparts across the academy, like the robust subfields of Asian American literature, sociology, and history."
6. By "the classical Asian philosophies," I mean the various historical traditions that originate in Asia: primarily, though not limited to, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. I also intend to include extensions of those traditions beyond the originary historical contexts of the canonical texts. Confucianism in Korea and Buddhism in Brazil, for instance, belong to such traditions in this broad sense.
7. David H. Kim, "What Is Asian American Philosophy?" in *Philosophy in Multiple Voices*, ed. George Yancy (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 219–71. See also Kim, "Asian American Philosophers," and Kim, "Frenemy Philosophy," 31 on "doing philosophy out of Asian American experience so conceived [as a significantly racialized phenomenon] and out of critical sensibilities built up from reflection upon it."
8. "The grouping 'Asian American' is not a natural or static category; it is a socially constructed unity, a situationally specific position, assumed for political reasons." Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996), 82.
9. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind," in *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: The Essential Early Essays*, ed. Nahum Dimitri Chandler (Fordham University Press, 2015), 111–38; W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Color Line Belts the World," in *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, ed. Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson (University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 33–34.
10. See, e.g., Diane C. Fujino, "Who Studies the Asian American Movement? A Historiographical Analysis," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 127–69; Yen-Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Temple University Press, 1993), especially ch. 2; Dina G. Okamoto, *Redefining Race: Asian American Panethnicity and Shifting Ethnic Boundaries* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2014).

11. See also Mar, "What Does Asian American Studies Have to Do With Philosophy?"
12. Mari Matsuda, "We Will Not Be Used," *Asian American and Pacific Islands Law Journal* 1, no. 1 (1993): 79–84.
13. Eduardo Mendieta, "From Imperial to Dialogical Cosmopolitanism," *Ethics and Global Politics* 2, no. 3 (2009): 241–58.
14. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton, 2007).
15. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 144.
16. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 85.
17. Mendieta, "From Imperial to Dialogical Cosmopolitanism."
18. Cf. Timothy Brennan, "Cosmo-Theory," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 3 (2001): 659–91; David Harvey, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000): 529–64.
19. Cf. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xv: "There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge." "Cosmopolitanism," then, can be said to have two senses. The first is a descriptive sense: there just *is* conversation across, between, and within traditions that is going on all the time. And some of that conversation is not by choice but by necessity, created by the political conditions under which we live. The second is the normative sense that I have already specified: a model of conversation driven by a commitment to pluralism, understanding, and engagement.
20. Cf. Kwong-loi Shun, "Methodological Reflections on the Study of Chinese Thoughts," in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy Methodologies*, ed. Sor-hoon Tan (Bloomsbury, 2016), 57–74.
21. See Evan Thompson, *Why I Am Not a Buddhist* (Yale University Press, 2020); Yarran Hominh and A. Minh Nguyen, "Cosmopolitanism, Creolization, and Non-Exceptionalist Buddhist Modernisms: On Evan Thompson's *Why I Am Not a Buddhist*," *Comparative Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2022): 139–59; Evan Thompson, "Creolizing Modern Buddhism: A Reply to Yarran Hominh and A. Minh Nguyen," *Comparative Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2022): 160–66.
22. As Walter Benjamin puts it: "[W]ithout exception the cultural treasures he surveys has an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. . . . There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 2007), 256.
23. There are, of course, directly imperialist versions of cosmopolitanism. See Harvey, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils"; Mendieta, "From Imperial to Dialogical Cosmopolitanism."
24. This contextualist principle does not determine textual meaning. It is consistent with there being many appropriate contexts and thus with polyvalence or multiplicity of meanings.
25. Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon* (Fordham University Press, 2014). The following discussion draws on parts of Hominh and Nguyen, "Cosmopolitanism, Creolization, and Non-Exceptionalist Buddhist Modernisms."
26. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 10.
27. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 10, 170.
28. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 3.
29. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 193.
30. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 177.
31. One Asian American Yellow Panther activist in San Francisco in the 1960s recalled thinking, upon reading Mao's *Little Red Book*, that "I was a Panther, I got a Red Book, I said, 'This Motherfucker's Asian.' I got an identity thing out of that." Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006), 276, n. 28.
32. Interestingly, insofar as the Third Worldist movement in the 1960s was heavily influenced by Maoism, the place of Asian American political identity with respect to Third Worldism is itself somewhat in the nature of a "return." See Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (Verso, 2006).
33. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 67.
34. Cf. Okamoto, *Redefining Race*, 3: "panethnicity is not a natural outcome or process, but a social achievement."
35. Cf. Thompson, "Creolizing Modern Buddhism."
36. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 167.
37. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Grove Press, 1963), ch. 5.
38. Thompson, "Creolizing Modern Buddhism."
39. For an excellent example of this method, see Kwong-loi Shun, "On *Jing* 敬: Thinking through Tang Junyi on Chinese Culture in Diaspora," *Chinese Studies* 31, no. 2 (2013): 35–61.
40. Shun, "On *Jing*."
41. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 262.
42. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.
43. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 256.
44. An interesting analogy to Ambedkar's interpretive method is to the US constitutional interpretation literature on "living originalism," which argues that an originalist focus on originating context is consistent with (indeed, perhaps even mandates) "living constitutionalism"—constitutional interpretation that treats the Constitution as changing in accordance with the times. See Jack M. Balkin, *Living Originalism* (Harvard University Press, 2011).
45. Ambedkar, "Buddha and Future of His Religion," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Volume 17, Part 2*, ed. Hari Narake, M. L. Kasare, N. G. Kamble, and Ashok Godghate (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2003), 98.
46. For an overview of and contribution to this literature, see Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma, introduction to *The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition*, by B. R. Ambedkar, ed. Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma (Oxford University Press, 2011), ix–xxiii.
47. See, e.g., Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Caste System* (Columbia University Press, 2005); see, for various responses, the essays in *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections*, ed. Anand Teltumbde and Suraj Milind Yengde (Penguin Books, 2018).
48. For one take on orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Ambedkar, see Christopher S. Queen, "Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (State University of New York Press, 1996), 45–71.
49. Christine Abigail L. Tan, "Freedom In': A Daoist Response to Isaiah Berlin," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2023): 255–75. See also Christine Abigail L. Tan, *Freedom's Frailty: Self-Realization in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang's Zhuangzi* (State University of New York Press, 2024).
50. Tan, "Freedom In,'" 267.
51. Qingfan Guo, *Collective Commentaries of the Zhuangzi* (Zhonghua Shuju, 1961), 148–49, cited in Tan, "Freedom In,'" 256. Translation by Christine Abigail L. Tan in text.
52. See Tan, *Freedom's Frailty*, 20.
53. Tan, "Freedom In,'" 270.
54. Tan's view has more in common with some Western feminist conceptions of freedom that also emphasize freedom amidst dependency. See, for example, Sharon R. Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Nancy J. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton University Press, 2003). For triadic conceptions of freedom, see Felix E. Oppenheim, *Dimensions of Freedom: An Analysis* (St. Martin's Press, 1961); Gerald C. MacCallum,

"Negative and Positive Freedom," *Philosophical Review* 76, no. 3 (1967): 312–34; Matthew H. Kramer, *The Quality of Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

55. Tan, "Freedom In," 271.

COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

Cavernous Cosmopolitanism: On Getting Lost When Most at Home

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ABSTRACT

As all four of the foregoing papers demonstrate in their respective ways, "cosmopolitanism" names a genus whose countless species answer to various writers' intuitions about what people are, how they form communities, and what the wider world is like. What all these cosmopolitanisms seem to have in common is an interest in blending the familiar with the strange, their divergent conceptual frameworks overlaid upon a deeper choice between sticking to conventional routines and embracing the potential anarchy of open-ended social exploration. The default conceptual framework tends to center on universal obligations, but the comparative study of traditions that we could reasonably call "cosmopolitan" shows us many alternatives to this legalistic interpretation of what a citizen of the world might be. Beyond critiquing the usefulness of any universal-obligations framework when interpreting traditions like Buddhism and Confucianism, the present paper traces out a line of thought that eventuates in total indecision about what a person is and what the wider world is like. At one level, this is simply the kind of conclusion that the present author would tend toward anyway; at another, it emerges directly from reading all of these papers in light of each other.

The word "cosmopolitanism" appears in the title of each of the four papers that we have been considering together, and I think that drawing out certain implications of the word itself can start some very interesting gearwheels turning. The tension between "cosmos" and "polis" obviously drives a great deal of the conversation: the cosmos is, at least in principle, *everything* while the polis is usually taken to be quite a lot *less* than everything. At first glance, taking anybody's polis and asserting that it *is* the cosmos seems to amount to taking a single part and equating it with the whole. This involves taking what is familiar and customary for that person (especially in its social aspects) and conflating it with something that is far too big and complicated for anyone to find familiar.

This conflation inevitably has two effects at once, as the concepts of city and universe get infused into each other. On the one hand, it cuts the cosmos down to size and makes it play by rules, domesticating something wild; on

the other, it invites the wild right into one's own hearth and home, radically expanding one's sense of the rules one had been playing by. Meanwhile, "cosmopolitanism" involves another crucial element beyond the fusion of city and universe: the "-ism" at the end connotes an ethos, attitude, or practice rather than some unconsidered fact about one's situation. A person might have a radically expanded sense of their (political) identity, or be equally at home in many different places, without this being *thematized* as something of explicit importance for their life. Being cosmopolitan is not identical to embracing cosmopolitanism or even to finding it interesting, any more than being a good person is identical to embracing a moral theory of some sort.

What all these papers are about is not so much *being* a citizen of the world as *wanting* to be a citizen of the world—or realizing *that* one already is and reflecting further about this fact. The "-ism" is reflective, conscious, deliberate, and (more often than not) idealistic. The importance of cosmopolitanism in these papers is not so paramount that it constitutes a moral rule or template by which we are to evaluate people and their actions, but it does rise high enough to be inspiring and troubling. If we cannot seem to formulate the cosmopolitan attitude or practice in a way that does justice to both cosmos and polis at once (keeping them conceptually distinct so as to make their fusion meaningful), then that seems to constitute a *problem* that might be addressed by some combination of more careful thinking and the bringing in of novel formulas from other reflective traditions. However long the difficulty may persist of formulating the ideal in question, that people continue to try indicates that their collective interest is being nurtured by something other than the contested formulas they happen to produce.

One productive way to think along with each of these papers is to see it (and its variously cited interlocutors) as growing from the pain and promise of simply being with other people at all. Other people are both like and unlike me, whoever I may be, so being with them is being with entities who are already both familiar and strange. Seeing myself in or as somebody else is a lot like seeing my city as the universe; it is also more basic, more inescapable, and more multifaceted as an engine of inspiring and troubling experience.

As I am using the terms, a "cosmopolitan" is somebody who *does* engage with the broader world of diverse social formations as effectively their home society while "cosmopolitanism" is a topic they could be *asked* about by someone curious about how to do this. How cosmopolitan a person is relates in complex ways to their ability and inclination to articulate cosmopolitanism, much like any practical ability relates to the practitioner's facility with recipes, regimens, and the rhetoric that draws new learners. In articulating cosmopolitanism, a practitioner thereof (whether aspirational or not) will rely on certain assumptions about what makes someone a citizen of the universal city, based on their understanding of what a person is in general, based in turn and in part upon their understanding of themselves. A version of me that is rational finds fellow rational beings interesting, worthwhile, and companionable

when decisions need to be made about the affairs of our community. A version of me that is in pain seeks aid from beings who understand and might help alleviate my pain. A version of me invested in the performance of certain roles seeks people similarly invested. And so on. It may sound like a staggering feat, when put into theoretical language, to cultivate a cosmopolitanism that includes non-human animals, but I am pretty sure I have been an avid fellow citizen with certain animals already, when playing with or otherwise appreciating them. I might actually be a fellow citizen even with the animals I eat, depending on my conception of what citizens do to one another. After all, one citizen frequently exploits or even orders the destruction of other citizens. To the extent that I see myself as an animal who enjoys meat, what could be more companionable in the cosmopolis of short-lived devourers than for me to act accordingly?

If, as Nalini Bhushan puts it in her paper, one formulation of “the cosmopolitan idea” is that it would have people “look beyond the conventions of their own local communities for the source of meaning, of justice, and of morality,” then what do we predict that they will find there? As Bhushan presents the conversation in which she is participating, what such people are expected to find is dignity, value, or worth that is apparently intrinsic to various kinds of sentient being. This intrinsic worthiness obliges us to act in certain ways toward its bearers. The conceptual apparatus of universal laws, justice, and rights makes sense as a fruit of the family tree that is rooted in the ancient Mediterranean city-states—the intuitions of citizen equality and beholdenness to laws having much less of a role to play in the Buddhist and Confucian frameworks examined by Nalei Chen and Tim Connolly respectively. Whether we approach our fellow universal citizens in ways that foreground their rationality, their experiences, their narratives, their bodies, or anything else about them, in framing them with the apparatus of rights and justice we expect to be obligated ourselves in some fashion. On this model, looking beyond the conventions of our own local communities shows us the truer or deeper nature of our obligations, hence it shows us to ourselves as living under a different set of quasi-legal demands than our merely local society would lead us to believe. Coupling “meaning” with “justice” and “morality,” meanwhile, means interpreting the significance of my own identity and life in terms of whether I have *done right* by my peers.

On Bhushan’s account, what the reflective cosmopolitan cultivates is “a sense of justice to oneself, to familiar others, and to unfamiliar others,” whatever those others might turn out to be. The “humanity” at the core of cosmopolitan concern is less a fixed essence—of the kind that would foreground any kind of difference, let alone hierarchy, between others that turn out to be human and others that do not—than it is a perpetually open potential. Our potency, as these entities that we call “human,” to imagine and invent and *re-invent* is at least as salient as our potency at reasoning or helping: indeed, *all* of our capacities are fundamentally creative, lest they be no longer live capacities but simply lists of things already done. The dichotomy between arrogance and humility appears twice in Bhushan’s discussion; she mentions this dichotomy in the specifically epistemic

context of trying to figure out whether we understand the lives and perspectives of others, but I think it is also helpful for understanding the more general “sense of justice” that these cosmopolitans work on in themselves. The reflective agent envisioned here does not feel entitled to treat people arrogantly; perhaps it would be better to say that, when they *do* treat people arrogantly, they learn to see this as a problem in that they have exceeded their entitlements. Humility involves respecting something about people (under any relevant description) and hence avoiding the overreach that less reflective people habitually engage in, transgressing against the innate worth that we all have in common.

An interesting feature of the reflective cosmopolitan, understood along these lines, is how committed they are to self-discipline. If I am to be a citizen of the universe, then that puts equal emphasis on the universe out there and on the would-be citizen right here. In an indefinitely extended society of normative equals, I may want to do a lot of things with those equals. In order to do so *properly*, however, I need to make sure that I am not transgressing against them. This carefulness and conscientiousness stands in tension with Bhushan’s emphasis on openness and creativity: “an open curiosity and feeling of wonder in the company of strange others” seems compatible with a range of whimsical, inconsiderate, or outright exploitative conduct that has little to do with carefully remembering to treat others as normative peers. However creatively I interpret *myself* as a reflective cosmopolitan, I must not let that creativity suggest to me that I am *not* ultimately under the quasi-legal obligation to treat people fairly. I should not let my curiosity lead me in directions that devalue people or that withhold the concept of value entirely, which means that in certain respects I need to be incurious and uncreative lest I cease to be reflective. Tension is not contradiction and this portrait of a conscientious being is perfectly coherent. What I want to foreground here is the fixity of this cosmopolitan’s commitment to being a good person or doing the right thing, along with the fixity of their framework of equal respect, to which openness and curiosity appear to be annexed as subordinate capacities. Anybody imaginative, inventive, and open enough to spend less of their energy on self-discipline may yet be cosmopolitan, at home with many kinds of people, but they may also have little motivation to embrace reflective cosmopolitanism in the ways that Bhushan talks us through.

If reflective cosmopolitanism centers on expanding one’s sense, perhaps indefinitely, of who one’s fellow citizens are, then Buddhism is an obvious trove of potential inspirations to mine. Like other classical Indian traditions, it extensively develops the idea that *sentience* is what calls forth compassionate reactions from properly or admirably constituted people—not any particular species identity or its configuration of capacities. Whether or not people are or have selves, as narratively identifiable sufferers they have gone through many species identities and many configurations of capacities even within each species. Awareness of suffering tends to yield concerned behaviors aimed at helping, unless that suffering gets deposited on the far side of a self/other distinction that localizes only some problems as “mine” and leaves the rest for “others”

to deal with instead. Fazang's metaphysical vision, while distinctive in its details, seems to have much the same ethical implication as most other Buddhist visions of reality: the disappearance or irrelevance or meaninglessness of one's own supposed self-contained identity is expected to yield a more compassionate personality. Chen and I certainly agree up to a point: "Fazang's totalistic vision entails a type of universal compassion. That is, we have (the same) ethical obligations towards all beings in the universe." The phrase "that is" suggests a simple restatement or clarification, but I think that pulling in the framework of universal obligations changes the topic entirely.

Any version of cosmopolitanism will apparently involve a *call* of some kind to relate to everybody in the same way. Speaking casually in various contexts, I readily characterize Buddhism as "cosmopolitan" given the universal scope of its teaching objectives and its multifaceted facility at reaching diverse audiences and complexifying itself in the process. But the inhabitants of the Buddhist cosmos are not citizens in any deep or ultimate sense: they are sufferers with complex stories, some of whom become better than others (as of any given time) at taking care of problems. Citizens deliberate together and recognize one another's rights; sufferers with complex stories look for help, and may be willing to help, but will be bad at both helping and getting help without the proper guidance. How exactly the Buddha's *dharma* relates to or derives from the perspectives and priorities and decisions of each individual sufferer is a complicated issue. What is *not* complicated is that it is the *Buddha's dharma*: in understanding the being whose *dharma* it is, we are to understand something different in kind (or at least in key) from the deluded and miserable creatures that form cities. In adding themselves to the *sangha*, humans do not add themselves to an autonomous society of equals—capable of engaging with other autonomous societies on equal terms—but plug themselves into a vast teaching enterprise that sees itself as peerless. As far as obligations go, there are plenty of vows and precepts on offer, but they constitute a range of expedient technologies (aimed at helping people overcome their problems) rather than binding us in some essential way. Why would obligations ultimately bind us when the *point* of any useful obligation is to liberate us?

The call to universal compassion is the ethical version or aspect of what Fazang is leading us through metaphysically, and the equivalence of equivalence and non-equivalence (which iterates indefinitely, given the equivalence of that *first* equivalence with non-equivalence) is not exactly the kind of theme we expect from theorists interested in laying down laws—whether of logic, of explanation, or of what makes behavior good. The conceptual framework of laws, justice, obligations, and rights could be appropriated for Mahāyāna Buddhist purposes just like any other *upāya*, rendering it functionally equivalent to such non-equivalent frameworks as Confucian virtue discourse or Buddhist vows and precepts. But the technologist is the one who renders such systems *technological* instead of ultimate, and legalistic cosmopolitanism annexed to Buddhist purposes seems very different in intent from a free and sovereign legalistic cosmopolitanism. Meanwhile, a free and sovereign legalistic cosmopolitanism might be interested

in annexing Fazang's Mahāyāna to the extent that the latter could make our obligations clearer, but step one in that process would be to ask what survives of rights and justice when all things are supposed to be "empty." Any Mahāyāna aficionado could helpfully point out that rights and justice are *conventionally* real much like their bearers and their agents, but how many inconvenient rabbit holes does *that* move open up? Step two, perhaps, would be for the legalistic cosmopolitan to wonder why it is that Buddhist rhetoric systematically avoids legal metaphors when conceptualizing its own mission, preferring language games centered (for example) on medicine and the creative arts.

I think that, on a Buddhist analysis, the idea that we are "required" to be compassionate or that something "demands" this from us would understandably arise for certain people who *are* relatively compassionate, who expect certain other people not to be, and who wish that all of us could get on the same page about the importance of caring for people. Intriguingly, ultra-compassionate beings like bodhisattvas are typically portrayed not as thinking that caring is "demanded" or "required" from them but as simply overflowing with emotionally and cognitively rich practical commitments that absorb them in the tasks of caring.

This encourages an interesting take on the significance of moral cosmopolitanism, whether or not it leans on legal frameworks: that it flows from an appetitive and affective foundation, from a *desire* to help others under some description and amid pressing circumstances. Assuming that a given writer recognizes the distinction between being liberated and not—which depends on genre, mood, and moment in addition to doctrine—bodhisattvas are not liberated, any more than the beings they want so much to save. The fact that the bodhisattva's rich practical commitments are features of *saṃsāra* renders them entirely imperfect, and in this miserable realm it could well make a lot of sense to recognize rights, distinguish universal from special obligations, and engineer just the right balance of loyalties between one's family or nation and all sentient beings. This is a Buddhist thing to do insofar as we approach it with an eye toward the liberation of those beings *from* whatever cosmopolis they currently make up: Mahāyāna cosmopolitanism, at least when placed alongside modern legalistic versions, seems premised on helping people *out of* the universal city, however much that requires (instrumentally) that dedicated citizens treat others as fellow citizens of it.

Much like classical Buddhist thinkers, classical Confucian thinkers do not present us with any foundational legalistic metaphor for understanding our condition as moral agents. If rules about how to treat all people are expedients from a Buddhist point of view (conducing toward the alleviation of suffering if they are formulated and used well), then they are also expedients from a Confucian point of view, not freely invented by compassionate beings so much as promulgated by human authority figures for the sake of social cohesion. At its worst, the resulting cohesion serves the private interests of those authority figures; at its best, it serves the common interest by promoting

norms that help people relate to one another in stable, effective, and satisfying ways. The primacy of human relationships in Confucianism makes *roles* a better concept for thinking about responsibility and obligation than *rules*. As Connolly alludes to in his paper, there is controversy among specialists as to whether Confucianism should be considered a “role ethics.” But the main competing interpretation foregrounds virtues over roles, not rules over roles.

The most important roles that Confucians care about formalizing are familial roles, followed by the political roles of superior and subordinate or lord and subject—which they relate in complicated ways to parent-child and elder-younger. As Connolly indicates, Confucian versions of cosmopolitan sentiment presuppose that the well-functioning moral agent is already performing well in these concrete, specific roles within a limited family and polity. Would-be Confucian cosmopolitans are in relatively little danger of leaning too far in the universalistic direction of denying special responsibilities to family and polity; they would be far more likely to succumb to the opposite risk, emphasizing family over any other human connection. The tradition likes to say of exceptional moral agents, especially exceptional moral agents in positions of political power, that they “treat all people as their children” or “treat the elders of others as elders” or “see everyone in the world as their siblings.” This is of course inspirational, but the Confucian tradition would be the first to insist that such phrases be taken only in a loose sense. To be willing to treat some random person as though he were your brother or father or son, when he is none of those, makes mincemeat of the very idea of being one’s brother or father or son: these must all be *specific individuals* with a specific kind of *importance* in one’s life. Treating random others as though they had that specific importance is something like (to borrow Kantian terms) adopting a maxim that contradicts itself.

The concreteness of familial and political obligations helps Confucian-style thinkers explain *why and to what extent they are obligations*: when we fail to treat people in role-appropriate ways, we suffer social and psychological consequences for doing so. (As do they, and this matters to the extent that we care about them.) Being “required” to do something or having it “demanded” of you makes a great deal of sense when your father or your king is talking to you, or your potentially rebellious subjects, or the erstwhile best friend who is contemplating never talking to you again. In situations where you are traveling abroad or newly placed in authority over many people, demands and requirements will pile up if you want to continue living safe and sound and on your current course. But, as Connolly’s paper implies, in every case these obligations are *specific* because it is not the case that literally everyone in the world is relating to you in a way that would command your attention. At least on my understanding of the Confucian tradition, when people are encouraged to imagine that everyone in the world really is commanding their attention, this is because they are being taught about how monarchs, high ministers, and other VIPs ought to be seeing themselves. It may be hard to codify *how* an emperor is supposed to relate to tens of millions of people, but he obviously needs to in

some fashion—far more than I need to, or anyone else who is likely to be reading this.

I would argue that Confucian-style thinking about the global community demonstrates the weakness of moral cosmopolitanism that is not also political cosmopolitanism. To whatever extent there actually is or will be a world-state, to that extent we are or will be fellow citizens. The classical Chinese tradition of political theory is very comfortable asserting that there either is or can be a single government that dominates the entire world, or at least the entire world that matters for those listening to or reading such ideas: a world order with more than one political center of gravity (from bipolarity on up) is taken to be problematic or even tragic in a way that a unipolar, hegemonic, or one-state world order is not. I would suggest that Confucian cosmopolitanism is *not* most coherently articulated through the idea that we should treat non-siblings as siblings or treat neither-guests-nor-hosts as though they were our guests or hosts. Rather, I think the sky-high territorial ambitions of Confucian statecraft have always been cosmopolitan—or, perhaps better, cosmarchic—idealizing the inclusion of all humanity within a single benevolent structure. A serious interest in reducing the number of competing power centers in the world, bringing them all under the guidance of a single virtuous regime, expresses core commitments of Confucianism in a way that experiments with universalizing role-specific obligations do not. Is there any kind of *rule* that says we ought to contribute to that project? I cannot see a way to make sense of such a rule within a Confucian framework. Is it anyone’s assigned *role* to do this? That is a more interesting and complex question; it draws us into the realm of political theology and Heaven’s Mandate.

To my mind, Yarran Hominh’s paper departs strikingly from the other three in this set. While he describes his project as a form of moral rather than political cosmopolitanism, this does not mean that he is engaged in armchair rather than real-world legislation. The word “obligation” does not appear once in Hominh’s paper, and at the conceptual level his “cosmopolitanism” is not about clarifying (let alone persuading people to organize their lives around) supposed universal obligations. It invokes not the allegedly purifying perspective of someone who discerns “what we really need to do” but instead the utterly impure perspectives of people just trying to make their way in a complicated and often unfriendly world. When confronting any arbitrary and unfair situation, people struggle against it, against one another, and against themselves. The creolization of philosophy is one way of extending and enriching this beginningless landscape of struggles, and it draws on a very different *aesthetics* of world citizenship than do the other philosophical activities outlined in the present set of essays.

The papers by Chen and Connolly essentially explore *proposals* that a person might make from a position of relative comfort and distance from ongoing struggles. A certain amount of comfort and distance is presupposed in the very act of theorizing about universal obligations, to say nothing of efforts at bringing in new dialogue partners across linguistic and civilizational divides. Huayan cosmopolitanism and Confucian cosmopolitanism are very

much experimental seedlings, not directly reflecting any party's exercise of force. Bhushan's paper does reference concrete struggles and their attendant political ambitions, but the theory-level discussion that she engages centers on abstract and general assertions about what people are, why they matter, and how we ought to see them. My supposed knowledge of what we really need to do portrays *itself*, at least, as comforting—as at some distance from the collective miseries enmeshing us. By contrast, the cosmopolitan activity that Hominh's paper foregrounds is candidly uncomfortable and avidly enmeshed. Its improvisatory spirit does not posit any kind of theory-level normative skyhook; this goes hand-in-hand with the idea that world citizenship is sometimes *forced* and hence does not reflect the kind of neutral poise that we expect in a legislator. If, as I laid out my language game above, a cosmopolitan is somebody who engages with a broad world of diverse social formations as effectively their home society, then you could certainly wind up cosmopolitan if your home, your city, your place is everywhere. But you could also wind up cosmopolitan if it is *nowhere*, because what you share with the person whose home is everywhere is that it is nowhere in particular.

The difference between these two kinds of cosmopolitan would not lie in their mobility or in their equal suitedness to being in many different places. It would lie in the emotional or existential quality of their mobility, in whether that equal suitedness amounts to equal comfort or equal discomfort. Because it is so typical to associate the word "cosmopolitan" with privilege and glamour and leisure activities, I think there is tremendous value in centering the points of view of people whose mobility and suitedness to different settings draw on necessity and carry unglamorous risks. There are countless ways for someone to wind up thinking more globally that have nothing to do with ethical theories or political ambitions, just like there are countless ways of finding people interesting that do not invoke a rule or norm that we *should* find them interesting. The way in which Hominh has framed his paper encourages curiosity about how armchair theorists have wound up in their respective armchairs, and the creolization process he describes makes sense as something rooted in those diverse origin stories. People are, after all, constantly repurposing and customizing cultural capital that they inherit from the past. This repurposing and customizing is done both by people who are relative peers with one another (think artists) and by people who are not: political elites, for instance, constantly co-opt ideas and sentiments that are popular among their subjects so as to justify themselves in their subjects' eyes. On the other side, any discourse or ideology shoring up some historical elite has probably been creolized by *someone* or will be soon enough—showing us a novel range of implications that may have always lurked inside that old-school way of thinking but that have not yet found a champion to realize them.

Earlier I talked about the dual potential of the "cosmopolitan" concept: it can both infuse the cosmos into one's sense of one's home society and infuse a sense of home into the cosmos. Both component concepts anchoring this movement are, of course, open to interpretation. Hominh presents the "forced cosmopolitan" as someone whose

sense of "home society" has been so infused with the range, diversity, and even chaos of the broader human world that it amounts to homelessness. A sense of *never* being at home might well *become* one's sense of being home, in which case any embrace of cosmopolitan-*ism* as a practice or an ideal will be an embrace of deliberately, reflectively operating as someone who has not yet settled down (and may not ever). To borrow a phrase that Hominh also borrows, "illicit blendings" may well be what we are—regardless of our efforts at playing by the rules of some established structure, some polis that could constitute an orderly alternative to the chaos all around. Planting ourselves firmly, even confidently, on our own illicit blendings is more than a political project, even in the capacious sense of "political" that Hominh's piece invokes. It is one way of begging no questions about which rules or structures one is supposedly promoting through one's practice, because that practice does not involve promoting rules or structures so much as simply dealing with and working through the person that one was already. On any analysis whereby people are mysteries and will continue to be mysteries no matter what they find themselves promoting, our unincorporated city-state of mishmash and abandon is already universal.

Bhushan's paper began by listing a selection from the bewildering array of adjectives that recent theorists have placed in front of "cosmopolitanism"—and she added her own to that array, "capacious." The capaciousness in question has to do with our capacity to accommodate others, in fact far *more* others than we might assume and certainly including non-humans among our fellow citizens. I suppose there is no reason *not* to drop my own adjective into the stew: "cavernous" cosmopolitanism is the kind I find most interesting in the wake of thinking through these papers. I got from "capacious" to "cavernous" primarily by way of Hominh's paper, driven also by a pre-existing skepticism toward universal norms that got richly nurtured by Chen's and Connolly's comparative reflections. If the world outside me is endlessly surprising and the world inside me is too, then there is very little basis for distinguishing the two. A person winds up cavernously cosmopolitan to the extent that they *expect* to be surprised or at least can always take surprise in stride; they embrace the corresponding "-ism" to the extent that they remind themselves how cozy and hospitable it is to be inspiring and troubling.

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FROM THE EDITORS

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APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy 24, no. 2 is dedicated to celebrating and reflecting on the work of Kate Manne in her 2024 book, *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia*. The issue showcases six invited commentaries on the book, followed by the author's response.

In "Go Big or Go Home: Kate Manne Directs Her Philosophical Gaze at Fatphobia," Alison Reiheld highlights key facets of Manne's takedown of prevailing views on fatness. As Reiheld notes, Manne's text productively identifies fatphobia not as an individual problem, but as a structural phenomenon in need of structural intervention. Reiheld outlines methodological continuities across Manne's philosophical work, and considers in particular how, in addition to her systematic challenging of faulty arguments about the harms of fatness, the autobiographical aspect of Manne's methodology allows for showing the actual suffering that comes from real-life, normalized experiences of fatphobia.

In "What Is Body Reflexivity? A Critical Assessment of Manne's Alternative to Body Positivity and Body Neutrality," Céline Leboeuf focuses on Manne's reflection on longstanding notions of body positivity and body neutrality within movements against fatphobia. As the names suggest, the body positivity and body neutrality movements promote having positive or neutral attitudes toward one's body, respectively. While showing there is much to be learned from the concepts, Manne provides critiques of both body positivity and body neutrality, and offers instead a concept of body reflexivity, which encourages shifting attention from judging bodies to suspending judgment. Here Leboeuf raises two questions: first, whether Manne's view sufficiently portrays the merits of body positivity; and second, whether all aspects of the distinction between body reflexivity and body neutrality are fully clear.

In "Hungry for More Intersectionality: A Review of *Unshrinking* by Kate Manne," Clarisse Paron highlights the importance of Manne's work to challenge fatphobia, in particular praising Manne's fourth chapter on "Demoralizing Fatness," which challenges presumptions of individuals' duties to lose weight (or stay skinny). Paron considers

possible expansions of Manne's work to connect with other intersectional analyses, exploring in particular the connections between fatphobia, ableism, racism, and heteronormativity. On the connection with ableism, Paron underscores the shared history of eugenics practices of targeting individuals with size and other physical and psychological impairments.

In "The Fallacies and Figleaves of Fatphobia: Expanding on Arguments in Manne's *Unshrinking*," Vanessa Voss considers Manne's exploration of fat stigma in academia as a whole and philosophy especially. Building on Manne's focus on fatphobia in philosophical works from Plato and Aristotle onward, Voss expands the scope to argue that fatphobic beliefs and actions perpetuate bad reasoning, bad rhetoric, and thought clichés. Voss summarizes her argument as follows: fatphobia is a "threat to the health of one's critical thinking skills. *And aren't you worried about your health?*"

In "The Future of Facing Fatphobia," Cheryl Frazier commends *Unshrinking* for its success in bringing fat scholarship and activism into conversation with philosophy with such care. Frazier considers Manne's identification of the harms of fatphobia as laudable, while suggesting that, if fat liberation is our goal, we need also to consider all the things that are right and valuable about being fat. Frazier outlines the importance of framing philosophical conversations about fatness in ways which do not preclude celebrations of fatness and recognitions of its benefit.

In our final commentary piece of the issue, "What I Love about *Unshrinking*, Why *Unshrinking* Makes Me Sad, and Six Things I'd Like to Talk about with Kate Manne," Samantha Brennan describes her own sadness and anger at the contexts which gave rise to some of Manne's first-person descriptions of the harms of fatphobia, including those which brought Manne to feel worried enough about how others would think about her body that she "flinched from the prospect" of usual book tour appearances. Noting her thorough appreciation for the book, Brennan outlines six points she'd like to talk about with Manne: 1) the connection between bodily shame and moral shame; 2) how different experiences of fatness in a range of sizes can be complexly related to shame; 3) possibilities for more expansive understandings of body positivity; 4) fatphobia and overstating the effects of parenting; 5) the variations in experiences of hunger; and 6) the harmful effects of fatphobia on stopping fat people from involvement in exercise.

The issue concludes with Kate Manne’s response to the commentaries, in which she takes up the questions raised about body reflexivity and positivity, the relationships between fatness and disability, and the weaponization of health discourse against fat people. She concludes by reflecting on her own positionality, and with thanks to her commentators for their contributions.

ABOUT APA STUDIES ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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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, 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 and Gender. 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*.

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3. 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

Go Big or Go Home: Kate Manne Directs Her Philosophical Gaze at Fatphobia

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Scholars in the humanities and public intellectuals have long contributed to rigorous thinking on fatness that is critical of prevailing social and medical discourse. Some of the most publicly and academically influential books on this topic in recent memory are those from sociologist Sabrina Strings and public intellectual Aubrey Gordon; somewhat farther back, legal scholar Paul Campos and medical sociologists Abigail Saguy and Deborah Lupton, and farther back still, Marilyn Wann’s foundational fat activist tome, *Fat!So?*

Where are philosophers who engage with fatness, whether within our discipline, interdisciplinarily,¹ or with the general public? As the moral panic over “the obesity epidemic” pairs with new weight loss uses of semaglutide drugs like Wegovy and Ozempic, what do philosophers bring to fat studies and public discourse on fatness? What do we bring to the table when we finally come to the table?

After a growing number of philosophical articles on fatness in journals and book chapters over the last decade and a bit, we are beginning to see book-length philosophical treatments. In summer of 2024, two books on fatness authored by philosophers made their way into the librasphere: Rekha Nath’s *Why It’s OK to Be Fat* and Kate Manne’s *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia*. While Nath’s work is beautifully concise, Manne’s work has spilled from this full-length book into a wide array of other media. In recent years, in part because of the broad audience she gained with *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Manne’s work has reached well beyond the academy, positioning her as both a scholar and a public intellectual.

In this critical essay, I will not attempt to give a complete summary of Manne’s thought-provoking book. I will lay out some important pieces of Manne’s argument, discuss how the argument remains essentially philosophical and methodologically similar to her previous work, and also address one of the features of her writing that often is seen as unphilosophical (but that, I argue here, should be seen as methodologically strong not only for rhetorical purposes but also for philosophical purposes).

1. IT’S ABOUT THE SYSTEM: HOW THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF UNSHRINKING PARALLELS MANNE’S ARGUMENTATION IN PREVIOUS WORK

Manne’s book is subtitled “How to face fatphobia.” And while she intends it to make a difference in how we behave, any author writing on this subject is first going to have to find a way to persuade people that the way we behave now is at best misguided and at worst vicious. They will have to address a slew of empirical claims that underpin and purportedly justify our collective, and individual, bad

behavior towards fat folks. The philosopher's tool of choice in the slog towards better collective understanding has long been argumentation.

Indeed, the vast majority of Manne's *Unshrinking* is perhaps best described as a rigorous takedown of prevailing views on fatness, with an aim to replace it with something better. As she writes in the Introduction, this book is "primarily a political and structural, as opposed to a psychological and individualistic, intervention. . . . I believe that when it comes to fatphobia, the solution is not to improve our self-image or love our bodies better. It is nothing less than to *remake the world* to properly fit fat bodies, and to effect the socially transformative recognition that there is truly nothing wrong with us" (8–9). Like her *Down Girl: A Logic of Misogyny* and its successor *Entitled*, Manne is focused here on systems, and not just individuals. In her previous work, Manne argued that misogyny is the enforcement arm of the system of norms and values that is patriarchy. As such, it can be enforced by anyone using the justifications and structures provided. Feminism attempts to critique, dismantle, and replace those norms and structures and mechanisms. This explains how anyone of any gender can be misogynist, and how anyone of any gender can be feminist.

Philosophically, *Unshrinking* takes a similar approach, framing fatphobia as "an inherently structural phenomenon, which sees people in fatter bodies navigating a different world, containing numerous distinct material, social, and institutional barriers to our flourishing" (12). In an important move that also bears similarity to moves she made in *Down Girl* where Manne considered how all the pieces of misogyny and patriarchy fit together into a kind of self-reinforcing justificatory logic, Manne notes that "particular instances of fatphobia may . . . feel like dispensing sound medical advice, picking the best person for the job, or objectively assessing the abilities of your pupils" (13). Finally, in classic form for analysis of systems, Manne notes that if everyone woke up tomorrow "magically free from fatphobic attitudes," the world would still need to change "to accommodate fat bodies and actively support us" (13).²

This kind of attention to structures and patterns of justification and of behaviors is something that philosophers are especially good at, though we are by no means the only discipline that does this. What Manne brings to the table is in part a laser-like focus on the arguments used to support and implement fatphobia, a keen awareness of how these interlock and mutually justify each other, and the use of argumentation to dismantle them and build something in their place.

Manne is extremely careful to correctly characterize³ the extent and nature of mainstream social and medical claims about fat folks, and to give evidence that these are in fact the main claims about fat folks, even while she critiques these views and provides reasons to believe they are faulty and thus make for poor behavior indeed. The claims she addresses throughout this book are broad-ranging, but boil down to the following:

- Fat folks are seen as fundamentally lazy, even seen as intellectually slow, in stereotypes dating back hundreds of years to the European enlightenment when thin-ness came to mean clever-ness and quick-ness⁴
- Fatness ("obesity") is seen as unhealthy (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Fat folks are frequently seen as morally bad, held responsible for their own fatness, and often denied compassion, respect, fair opportunities in employment, social supports, and healthcare (this theme appears in every chapter, though most notably Chapter 4: "Demoralizing Fatness")
- Fat folks are seen as disgusting, gross, and often as ugly and undesirable (Chapters 4 and 5 in particular, though not only)
- Fat folks are seen as weak and out of control over their own desires, and can show the opposite by dieting and sticking to diets (Chapters 7 and 8)

One reason that Manne lays these out is to support her overarching claim, drawing in part on the work of Madeline Ward to argue that fatphobia is part and parcel of a system oppressing fat folks. And consonant with most arguments about oppression, Manne wants us to see how pervasive these beliefs and corresponding behaviors are, how they are built into systems and structures, into institutions and practices and buildings, as well as into individual habits of thought and action.

2. THE ARGUMENT CLINIC: HOW MANNE USES ARGUMENTATION TO TAKE DOWN ARGUMENTS ABOUT HEALTH AND FATNESS

I come to this book from both feminist philosophy and medical ethics. So, permit me to indulge in a deep dive into the aspects of Manne's work most relevant to mine, since it also allows us to see the philosophical skills Manne brings to the table.

Manne does a fine job across several chapters of showing how health and morality claims about fat folks are used to cast fat folks as unfit parents of both humans and pets (32–23), to deny them access to surgeries which they could not get access to unless they lost weight which almost never happened and thus was long-term denial of care (31–32), and to deny access to prenatal care on the grounds that fat pregnant persons are too "high risk" (27). The list is much larger than these, in terms of negative impacts of fatphobia on fat folks, too large to summarize here. But of particular interest to me in thinking about philosophical methodology is Manne's critique of the reasoning and evidence that people use to support the twin claims that fatness is unhealthy, and that people have control over their fatness by means that would improve health.

Manne uses her storehouse of philosophical skills to, among other things, argue plausibly for flaws in the causal reasoning of anti-fat health claims. It's a classic

aspect of causal arguments that when two things, A and B, are correlated, we have to consider at least four logical possibilities: A causes B, B causes A, some third thing C causes the correlation between A and B, or, well, it's just coincidence. While Manne herself doesn't explain it exactly this way, she deploys these logical possibilities in her argumentative strategy in Chapter 2, which focuses on health claims as justifications for treating fat people as inherently unhealthy which thus purports to justify weight loss in the name of fat folks' own welfare.

Manne takes on the design of hallmark studies of fatness and ill health, thereby casting doubt on the seemingly self-evident nature of the claim that fatness correlates strongly with ill health (37–40). She also mounts a case that correlation plausibly does not equal causation when it comes to fatness and ill health, even when that association is present, by giving alternative causal explanations for the same poor health outcomes.

Manne raises several studies that should make us question whether, for instance, fatness causes diabetes (A leads to B) or diabetes causes fatness (B leads to A), noting that high amounts of insulin in the blood as a person's type 2 diabetes is developing can precede and cause weight gain even as many fat people never develop diabetes (45). She also points out that there are studies indicating that the associations themselves are suspect, noting, for instance, that while some research shows all-cause mortality is higher for fat folks, studies looking at weight loss do not show that weight loss necessarily lowers all-cause mortality, and specifically that physical activity and fitness level have vastly more impact on all-cause mortality than body weight (49). This should at least weaken the case for pushing for weight loss.

Manne also makes several arguments along the lines of "some third thing C causes both A and B," proposing that fatphobia and specifically anti-fat stigma can contribute to some of the worrisome health outcomes that have typically been attributed to fatness simpliciter. An intriguing study indicated that patients with "high internalized weight stigma" were three times more likely to have metabolic syndrome—several of high blood pressure, high blood glucose, abnormal cholesterol, and high waist circumference—and six times more likely to have high triglycerides compared with participants who had much lower internalized weight stigma (51). And, the harms of weight cycling, which occurs when diets fail (which they nearly always do, leading to weight loss followed by weight regain), are widely documented and include many of the same outcomes attributed to fatness (40–44). In addition, Manne argues that since weight stigma causes fat folks to avoid seeking medical care, it results in delays in cancer screenings, a finding well-supported by research and which could independently explain higher death rates from cancer (52).⁵ Manne also notes that there are clear correlations between exercise avoidance and experiencing weight stigma in fitness settings or while exercising publicly outdoors (52–53), when exercise has enormous health benefits regardless of body size and composition. All of these give plausible reasons to think that some third thing, C, is causing a correlation between A and B (fatness and poor health outcomes).

Manne gets really clear about this in a lovely little section where she summarizes a series of causal relationships that provide alternate explanations. Here are a few:

Higher weight → Weight cycling → poorer health

Poorer health → Higher weight

Higher weight → Weight stigma → Stress → Poorer health (53–54).

And so, she argues, what we do know is that the health risks of fatness have been consistently overstated, carelessly reasoned about, and that *independently of these*, fat folks "still deserve support, compassion, and adequate healthcare" (55).

In the process of debunking the empirical claims that underpin health claims, in particular, Manne goes on to cast doubt on the widely held notion that we should conflate health with worth, saying at the end of Chapter 2, "there should be no shame in not being healthy. And a person's good health should never be a prerequisite for their being treated with empathy and kindness and respect" (58).⁶

While formal logical argumentation and a keen grasp of taxonomies of arguments have long been the philosopher's tool of choice, they are not the only philosophical tool that Manne wields. She also wields stories and personal experience, both autobiographical and the stuff of others' lives, as legitimate aspects of philosophical reflection. These philosophical tools are seen too often by mainstream traditional philosophy as rhetorical moves that undermine the strength of claims.

3. STORIES MATTER: PHILOSOPHY HAS A PROBLEM WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE AS METHOD, BUT THEY ARE REFLECTIVE TOOLS AND EPISTEMIC RESOURCES

Study after study has shown that to be persuaded, a typical person is more likely to be moved by a combination of stories and reasons than by reasons alone.⁷ All too often, such stories are pooh-poohed in both philosophy and the hard sciences as both biased and "merely anecdotal." But stories have a role to play in reasoning, not merely persuasion.

If philosophy is ever to speak to the problems of the real world, it must engage the real world as it is. And while statistics and larger social patterns help us to see that, we also need stories to understand those patterns and their impacts. When I first began presenting at conferences on trans folks' issues with accessing basic medical care—not even gender-affirming care, but the same medical care anyone with a body might need—I would present what I thought were compelling philosophical arguments about principles and patterns. And yet, at conferences a clinician would inevitably stand up to say, "That sounds awful, but no one I know would treat someone like that" or "I don't want to be part of this, but how can I know what that looks like in practice?" Formal argumentation with allegedly

objective population-level data is both argumentatively and persuasively insufficient. It just doesn't provide enough to do more. It certainly doesn't show us enough about what behaviors to change. And let's be clear: the subtitle of Manne's book isn't just "what's wrong with fatphobia"—it's "how to face fatphobia." We need to know what it looks like at the base level to do better: in our schools, in our workplaces, in our clinics, and yes, in our families and at our dinner tables.

In addition, to take stories seriously, we must fight the now-classic tendency in our discipline to dismiss insights rooted in personal experience.⁸ Personal experience is a source of knowledge for oneself. Testimony about personal experience is a source of knowledge for others. Epistemology has long dealt with personal testimony, culminating in recent work by Kristie Dotson, Miranda Fricker, José Medina, Kate Abramson, and others on aspects of epistemic injustice connected to personal experience, whether it be testimonial smothering, testimonial injustice, or gaslighting.

Throughout *Unshrinking*, Manne uses narratives of personal experience to show how, and how much, fat folks suffer under fatphobia. She begins and ends autobiographically, and includes the lived experience of others.

In the Introduction, she opens the first paragraph saying, "I should have been thrilled" (3) and goes on to recount how, during the publicity for *Down Girl*, as it was gaining steam, her publisher suggested Manne go on a publicity tour in London with bookstore readings and television appearances. "I flinched from the prospect. I felt too fat to be a feminist in public. I felt too big to speak out about the 'down girl' moves that teach girls and women to be small, meek, and quiet" (3). It is this, among other experiences, that set Manne on the path of writing *Unshrinking*.

Immediately, Manne has acknowledged her own membership in the group about which she writes: fat folks. This is important both as a philosophical method and as a rhetorical method. Philosophically, it taps into standpoint epistemology, which posits that folks in particular social locations have special access to knowledge at least about what it is like to be in that social location, and sometimes even greater knowledge because they have to be able to move back and forth between what their lives look like to them and what they can expect their lives to look like to others. Rhetorically, it is extremely fraught for a person who is not a member of a group to speak about and especially to speak for that group. Manne takes care not to conflate her experience with all experiences and to bring in the experiences of folks for whom fatness manifests differently. But it's worth noting here that when Manne first began doing audiovisual publicity for *Unshrinking*, the fat studies social media circles I am part of all blew up with people asking who Kate Manne was and why someone so small was speaking for them. Others pointed out that she acknowledged she'd been much larger in the past, and is still perceived by others as fat.⁹ When dealing with a topic like this as a member of a group affected by the topic, it is valuable to acknowledge that membership. And it is more epistemically virtuous to do so than to persist in the belief

that not being a member of the group somehow makes you more epistemically virtuous, as though you have no corresponding group membership of your own. Being thin certainly doesn't make one a more reliable knower about fatness than a fat person.

But Manne doesn't just rely on her own testimony. She lays out the lived experiences of others. Indeed, the very first paragraph of Chapter 1 tells the tale of Jen Curran, who was prescribed weight loss in the form of vague recommendations to diet and to exercise, as a way to restore her kidneys to health because during her recent pregnancy, she shed protein in her urine. Curran asked her kidney specialist, "And if I lose weight, the protein will go away?" Yes, she was told, come back in four months. She felt misgivings about this response and sought a second opinion a month later. She was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a bone marrow cancer (15–16). A four-month wait for weight loss that is statistically unlikely ever to come might well have cost her life. Manne follows Curran's story with that of someone whose diagnosis came too late. Jan Fraser lost sixty pounds rapidly without trying to. Jan's sister, Laura, told Jan she looked great. But in fact, Jan had vaginal bleeding and near-constant pelvic pain that made it hard to eat. Finally, someone she saw ordered blood work. She was admitted to intensive care for sky-high calcium levels. There, an MRI revealed a huge mass in her abdomen, and metastatic cancer in her pelvis, bladder, and lungs. As Manne puts it, "Jan lived just six months longer. She continued to waste away throughout her rounds of chemotherapy. And people continued to compliment her on her weight loss" (17).

These kinds of stories—Manne's own and those of others—persist throughout the book as exemplars of patterns. We ignore stories at our peril, especially when used for exemplification. As public health giant Paul Farmer once said,

the experience of suffering, it is often noted, is not effectively conveyed by statistics or graphs. The "texture" of dire affliction is perhaps best felt in the gritty details of biography, and so I introduce [stories of people whose health was catastrophically damaged by social forces].

[They] are anything but "anecdotal." For the epidemiologist as well as the political analyst, they suffered and died in exemplary fashion. [Others] living in similar circumstances can expect to meet similar fates . . . stories illustrate some of the mechanisms through which large-scale social forces crystallize into the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering.¹⁰

This is one excellent methodological use of narrative and is one way that Manne uses both the stories of others and her own: to embody the larger patterns she also describes, as well as to give them epistemic authority and detail. That detail—the detail that folks in my initial audiences on trans access to health care craved—is necessary for not only persuasion and rhetorical force but for reflection and understanding. Medical anthropologist Clifford Geertz

writes about this when he points out that we hit trouble if descriptions are too “thin”: that very thinness makes the description “insufficient” to the epistemic task at hand and can even be “misleading.” To get the right of it, we need “thick descriptions” based on what “local informants” can tell us about “local behaviors” and truths. Those thick descriptions are narratives. Those local informants are the narrators of their own lives.

The case for philosophical use of narratives, thick descriptions, and testimony is strong. Of course, what sense do we make of circumstances where personal testimony sometimes falls on both sides of an issue? We have several options. One, some cases may not be exemplars, but instead outliers. This is an issue that Manne explicitly addresses at several points, suggesting for instance that many people’s personal testimony of effective weight loss clearly per the larger evidence are not exemplars but are outliers. A second option also exists when personal testimony falls on both sides of an issue: that personal testimony is, sometimes, not a result of insight but a result of self-deception and of deception of the self by others. This is, in fact, the topic of Chapter 7, “Dinner by Gaslight,” in which Manne essentially argues that continuing to pursue weight loss when weight is not so damaging and weight loss is so difficult is surely not the result of believing the evidence of our senses.

Another aspect that requires personal testimony because it requires access to states of mind and emotional status is Manne’s discussion, shot throughout the book, of pleasure and pain with respect to food. She raises this explicitly in Chapter 3, “Demoralizing Fatness,” when she notes the way that we restrict ourselves with respect to food based in part on how we judge ourselves morally, and sometimes punish ourselves with food for negative moral judgments about ourselves that have nothing to do with our bodies (80–81). Manne delves into these themes in Chapter 8, “The Authority of Hunger,” speaking of suffering caused by dieting, and the way that the framework of dieting and weight loss makes hunger-related suffering into a good thing, and food-related pleasure into a bad thing. As subjective states, we need thick descriptions and narratives to understand suffering and pleasure. Even those who have been gaslit into dieting, by themselves or others, still describe hunger pangs and other kinds of suffering such as dizziness or fainting with calorie restriction, never mind the life-long consequences of weight loss surgery. How much stronger must the gaslighting (Chapter 7) be when it can make us accept the kind of pain and suffering that is a bodily imperative to stop (Chapter 8)?

The interplay of subjective experience and objective pattern is rich in *Unshrinking*. And while some would use the presence of personal narrative to dismiss the more traditionally philosophical argumentation, I suggest that is a terrible waste of both modes of reflection and understanding.

At the very end of the book, Manne brings the use of personal experience full circle. Writing in the Conclusion, she says,

At the end of this book, you may be wondering how I now feel about my body. . . . My story is still very much being written. And in part it is because it is not in bodily self-love, but rather a shift in perspective, in which I have found my freedom.

The thought that has helped me the most, in navigating all of this, is that *my body is for me*. Your body is for you. My body is not decoration. Your body is not decoration. . . . This notion—“body reflexivity,” as I’ll call it—differs from both body positivity and body neutrality. . . . It is compatible with finding oneself beautiful, or sexy—or not, as the case may be. We may decline to think about our appearance much whatsoever. . . . We are not responsible for pleasing others.

A natural corollary: your reaction to my body is not my problem—or the point, or salvation. The body is not an object for correction or colonization or consumption. I am sorry, not sorry, if my body leaves you cold, or you find it to be wanting. (195–96)

Manne wraps with a concrete example of how the intellectual journey captured in this book has affected her life. Whereas at the beginning, she was afraid to go fully clothed on a book promotion tour, at the last, she is no longer, and what she is sorry and not sorry for has shifted dramatically:

I am sorry, not sorry, to have just bought my first swimsuit in more than twenty years. . . . I am not going to wear a cover-up. . . . And that feels like a minor miracle—even a happy ending. (208)

One might be forgiven for thinking that, with this much personal narrative, we’ve lost the structural element. But of course, all that is still present. The external gives rise to the internal, inculcating and reinforcing it at every turn until far too many of us have come to believe that what was created is what actually is the case.

In this context, we do the best we can. We need a little hope when we’re living under oppression,¹¹ a little hope for how the larger scheme can change, but also for how we can live well within it. After all, as Kathryn Norlock argues in her beautiful article “Perpetual Struggle,” we might never and probably will never reach a perfectly just world. What matters is how we go on with that imperfectionist realization, in solidarity. Kate Manne is calling for a more perfect world, but she knows we are living in the one we have. I’ll take whatever improvements we-who-have-bodies can get.

4. THE UPSHOT

Is there more that could be said? Absolutely. I could talk in detail about Manne’s commitment to intersectionality, which is effective in places but drops away in others. I could wax poetic about some nuances of language and how much I enjoyed realizing the chapter titles were plays on words. But no review can do everything and I’ve chosen my hills—hills on which I do not intend to die but from which I

hope to help you look down upon this book, which is very much worth your time, your courage, and your intellect.

Unshrinking is almost entirely about the systemic nature of fatphobia as an oppressive system that sends damaging messages and creates injurious structures that greatly harm actual persons. Like the norms of patriarchy within us and the mechanisms of misogyny outside of us that Manne laid out in *Down Girl*, fatphobia sinks into both how we think of ourselves and others and gets built into the world around us.

You might not believe that fatphobia is a problem. You might not believe that it's systemic, and structural, as well as individual. You might not believe that fatness is less deadly and less controllable than it's been portrayed to be. You might not believe that aesthetic judgments about fat bodies as ugly bodies are both socially constructed and changeable. You might not believe that fat folks deserve support, compassion, pleasure, delight, and health care in the bodies we have. You might not believe you've been sold a bill of goods that has led you to be gaslit, to gaslight yourself, and to gaslight others into weight loss culture. You might not believe that the suffering experienced under the coerced hunger of dieting deserves our attention.

But if you go into *Unshrinking* with an open mind, with a philosophical stance towards reasons and reasoning, with a willingness to consider fat people's stories as evidence and a willingness to reconsider what you think you know, you're going to both enjoy and learn from this book. Perhaps you'll be persuaded, as Manne says near the very end, that "We only have one body. So we will have to learn to live with it." Perhaps some of this will move you to learn to live well, to live a flourishing life with the body you have, to support others in doing so.

NOTES

1. Few of us have reached out into the interdisciplinary field of fat studies: the *Fat Studies Reader* (2010) won numerous awards and its fifty-three contributors included not a single philosopher. The same was true for the *The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies* (2021). Whereas medical ethics is rife with philosophers, fat studies is not. Perhaps the most famous foray of a philosopher addressing fatness was that by an eminence gris of medical ethics, Daniel Callahan, who in a 2013 article in a flagship medical ethics journal argued that clinicians should fat-shame patients in medical encounters for fat folks' own good if that's what it takes to get them to lose weight. Callahan's article received coverage the week of its publication in *USA Today*, *The Atlantic*, *The Huffington Post*, and various public-facing websites for schools of public health. His critics did not, whether the calls came from outside our house or inside of it.
2. The alert reader well versed in philosophy of disability will recognize some elements of the social construction of disability in this kind of claim. Manne addresses ways in which issues of fatness and disability overlap in Chapter 2, in her Conclusion, and in several of her copious endnotes, briefly. No one philosopher can do all things, but one of several wishes I have for philosophical considerations of fatness is that we give deeper thought to the way that society disables fat folks with institutions and our built environment.
3. As I think on the methodology here, I am mindful of philosopher of science Daniel Dennett's synthesis of Anatol Rapoport's rules for critical engagement, in *Dennett's Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Successful Thinking*, the first of which is "You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, 'Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way.'"

4. This stereotype persists. Geoffrey Miller, a psychology professor permanently employed at University of New Mexico who was a visiting professor at New York University at the time, became famous in part for his 2013 Twitter post that read: "Dear obese Ph.D. applicants: if you didn't have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won't have the willpower to do a dissertation #truth." While there was a massive backlash and Miller was censured by UNM, which prohibited him from supervising graduate students for a time, a study in the journal *Obesity* released at the same time concluded that thinner candidates were more likely to find postgraduate positions and more likely to receive positive recommendations than their obese peers, a bias particularly pronounced among women (Burmeister et al., "Weight Bias in Graduate School Admissions"). I sometimes wonder whether the hesitancy of philosophers to engage critically with issues of fatness is in part based in this stereotype that fat folks are intellectually incompetent, as though sympathy with fat folks inherently implies lack of intellectual rigor.
5. Health care providers looking at racial disparities in cancer mortality have learned to look at access to screenings as well as access to treatments, not just assuming that certain racial groups have higher race-based risk of dying of that cancer. The same move needs to be made with respect to studies of cancer mortality and fatness.
6. While Manne goes on to argue for the demoralization of fatness (Chapter 3), I could wish for more, here, of an examination of health and how it can be used as a "weapon." I'm mindful of avoiding the Reviewer 2 pitfall of critiquing an author for not having written the thing I wanted to write, so I'll just say that debates over health are not Manne's only focus, and note that there are critiques to be made of the very notion of "health" much less of our conflation of good health with moral worth. There are numerous excellent books and articles on the concept of health within philosophy of medicine, including most recently Elizabeth Barnes's *Health Problems*. The reader who wants specifics on theories of health and how they connect to fatness, may be interested in my own work on this (Reiheld, "Thin or Thick, Real or Ideal").
7. Yes, philosophers, though warped by our years in the discipline, are also subject to the way most folks reason. The same is true for clinicians, not just members of the general public. Any person who is a specialist in a particular society is, at root, a person who has acquired the norms of that society and possibly also fought hard to unlearn them with varying degrees of success.
8. The alert reader may recall the kerfuffles in the 2000s and 2010s that involved derogatorily labeling various subjects from feminist theory and women's studies to black studies to disability studies as "me studies," indicating that acknowledging the social location of the inquirer somehow undermines legitimate inquiry rather than being part of legitimate inquiry.
9. That some folks found Kate too slim to be speaking on fatness and for fat folks, while fatphobic comments on her articles and posts clearly showed that society at large found her plenty fat enough to be the target of fat jokes, was a bitter juxtaposition for me to observe.
10. Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence," 12.
11. See Katie Stockdale's work on hope under oppression, among others, for more on this.

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What Is Body Reflexivity? A Critical Assessment of Manne's Alternative to Body Positivity and Body Neutrality

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In *Unshrinking*, Kate Manne confronts fatphobia, tackling, among other issues, the challenges fat persons encounter in medical settings, the pressures that diet culture exerts on them, and the discrimination they meet daily. She concludes with reflections on how to fight fat oppression and addresses the body positivity and body neutrality movements, which have both positioned themselves as paths toward greater body acceptance. Manne reviews longstanding criticisms of these movements and articulates an alternative notion she dubs "body reflexivity" (196).

As a philosopher who has written on body positivity, I believe this is the most useful entry point to dialogue with Manne. As part of these preliminary remarks, I also want to acknowledge my positionality as someone who has been thin their entire life. Since the modern-day body positivity movement owes much to the fat acceptance and fat liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to recognize this indebtedness along with the cooption of the movement by smaller persons today. In crafting my responses to Manne, I strive to be mindful of this history.

The body positivity movement, as its name suggests, promotes having a positive attitude toward one's body. To put things simply, proponents of body positivity encourage us to embrace a positive outlook to counter the "negativity" many of us experience because our bodies do not measure up to dominant beauty standards, including those regarding body shape and fatness. According to Manne, if this movement requires "feeling uniformly positive about own's own body," then it is not "realistic" (202). Indeed, it would fail to consider the lived experiences of trans people, "some of whom need or want to change their bodies in significant ways," or those of "chronically or disabled people who may feel, at least at moments, that their bodies have betrayed them" (202). I agree. Further, as Manne points out, body positivity so construed intersects with the broader notion of "toxic positivity"—that is, the mandate to only embrace positive emotions and reject negative ones. Such positivity ultimately backfires by forcing people to ignore their emotions about their bodies, which, in turn, prevents self-integration (204). Despite its intuitive pull,

body positivity stifles the agency of those who struggle to marshal sunny feelings about their bodies.

In response to the perceived shortcomings of the body positivity movement, some have adopted a position called "body neutrality." Its defenders include such celebrities as the actor Jameela Jamila and, more recently, the singer and songwriter Lizzo. According to this alternative, we ought to adopt a neutral attitude toward our bodies. Drawing on psychological research, Manne worries that "a truly neutral attitude is hard to maintain" (204). She adds that this notion may, to some, be "tinged with negativity." Moreover, given how bodies are so often subject to scrutiny, body neutrality is "surely hard to conjure routinely" (204). Ultimately, according to Manne, "body neutrality seems at best a precarious retreat from judgment, not a stable resting place" (204). Or, to put a different spin on it, this position suffers from one of the same worries as body positivity, at least in its toxic expressions: it is impracticable.

Manne enters this debate by recommending a third notion: *body reflexivity*. This alternative "doesn't require one monolithic attitude toward our own body or that of others" (202). Instead, it "offers an escape from the apparently exhaustive options of positivity, negativity, or neutrality, by proposing a different focus" (205). As Manne puts it, "rather than changing how bodies are assessed, it urges us to transcend the mode of assessment entirely" (205). In other words, she encourages us to shift our attention from judging our bodies to suspending judgment. She elaborates that "a body is not something good or bad or neutral for people generally, but rather something that may suit and work better or worse for its denizen—in other words, the person who inhabits it" (205) since that person's "perspective on her body is the only one that matters" (205).

Manne cites the following merits of "body reflexivity." First, it is tied to a "politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be fat, or trans, or nonbinary, or queer, or disabled" (205). Second, "body reflexivity can recognize the psychological consequences of our current political predicament" (205). That is, it is understandable to "feel insecure" in a world in which some "are made to be insecure" in their embodiment (205, emphases in the original). That is, Manne wants to resist the toxic strands of body positivity, which fail to acknowledge the difficulties people living in non-normative bodies face. In so doing, she seeks to offer a more realistic option than the hotly debated movement has.

Body reflexivity mirrors Manne's structural critique of fatphobia. Just as fatphobia is not merely a matter of individual prejudice, so too making peace with one's body is not a requirement of individuals. Rather than insisting that we adopt either a positive or neutral attitude towards our bodies in the face of body shaming, Manne calls on us, as a society, to accommodate the diversity of human embodiment. Or, as she puts it, "the world has to be remade; it has to serve you better" (206). After describing body reflexivity, Manne briefly pauses on how to challenge fatphobia specifically. In that context, she asserts that we ought not to rely on "reforming beauty standards"

(206). Responding to the works of A.W. Eaton and Cheryl Frazier, who contend that beauty has a place in resisting fat oppression, Manne offers what she calls a “blunter and less nuanced” suggestion: “fuck beauty culture, along with diet culture” (206).¹ She enjoins us to “dress and look how you want not in the name of any kind of beauty but for the sake of being the most yourself that you can presently imagine” (207). While Manne acknowledges we are far from reaching this point, she hopes for a “total divestment from beauty and diet culture” (207). Instead of using beauty as a way of reforming others’ perception of fat (and other nonnormative) bodies, it need not figure in our strategies for facing fatphobia.

Having sketched Manne’s alternative to body positivity and body neutrality, I now raise two critical questions about her view. First, is Manne fair to body positivity? Second, is body reflexivity truly different from body neutrality?

To begin, let’s consider Manne’s objections to body positivity. Manne singles out forms of body positivity that require us to have an unendingly positive attitude toward our bodies. By using phrases like “one monolithic attitude toward our own body or that of others” (202), “feeling uniformly positive about one’s body” (202), or “the general mandate to be positive about our bodies” (204), she pinpoints a form of positivity that is tantamount to an imperative: Thou shalt always have a positive attitude toward your body! Framed in this way, body positivity is surely unrealistic. But has Manne painted body positivity in overly broad brushstrokes? Are there forms of body positivity deserving of consideration?

To achieve greater clarity on these questions, we should first distinguish having a positive body image from body positivity. In a recent article published in *Body Image*, Nichole Wood-Barcalow, Jessica Alleva, and Tracy Tylka disentangle positive body image and body positivity. Positive body image, as studied by psychologists, is taken to include appreciating one’s body and caring for it. As Tylka and Wood-Barcalow indicate in an earlier article, positive body image is “a distinct construct from negative body image, *multifaceted* (with the facets including body appreciation, body acceptance and love, adaptive appearance investment, broadly conceptualizing beauty . . . filtering information in a body-protective manner).”² Thus, in the scientific literature on the topic, having a positive body image does not mean having a single attitude about one’s body but rather encompasses a range of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It is also worth emphasizing that psychological studies of positive body image have suggested that embodying the associated attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is within reach.³ This implies that the motivation to embrace body neutrality as a more realistic alternative to body positivity is misguided and rests on a conflation between having a positive body image and “being body-positive” as touted on online platforms.⁴ In contrast, the body positivity movement, as it is channeled in social media environments (usually under the hashtag #BoPo), often has toxic elements: “body positivity content typically does not normalize the experience of negative body-related thoughts and emotions. This narrowed scope aligns with toxic body positivity, or the belief that

people should always think positively about their body, which is the body-specific form of the larger concept of toxic positivity.”⁵ On this point, Manne and body image researchers would agree: body positivity threatens to veer into toxic positivity.

With the distinction between positive body image and body positivity on the table, let’s consider an instantiation of the ethos to promote positive body image without policing us. Consider the activist work done by Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott with The Body Positive, an organization they founded in 1996 and whose tenets are outlined by Sobczak in her 2014 book *Embody: Learning to love your unique body (and quiet that critical voice!)*. The five pillars of their work are the following. First, they call on us to reclaim health, in particular, by challenging fatphobic biases in medicine. Second, they encourage us and offer practices for practicing intuitive self-care—notably, the practice of intuitive eating. Third, they call on us to cultivate self-love: here, they rely on Rousseau’s distinction between *amour propre*, which involves hierarchical thinking, and *amour de soi*, which entails pursuing one’s well-being.⁶ For Sobczak and Scott, self-love does not require a nonstop positive view of oneself (or one’s body) but rather self-compassion and self-forgiveness.⁷ Fourth, they ask that we redefine beauty in inclusive ways. Fifth, they sketch the need for community-building as part of resistance to toxic messages about our bodies. While Manne might disagree with the fourth pillar, I imagine that some of their other messages would resonate with her. And yet, if we stick to the letter of the organization’s branding, Scott and Sobczak seem to embrace some version of body *positivity*.

Similarly, in my article “What Is Body Positivity? The Path from Shame to Pride” (2019), I describe body positivity as a rejection of *limiting* body shame and a transition to *proper* body pride. Using the work of Luna Dolezal, I define “limiting body shame” as shame that “can be restricting and must be overcome for life to have the possibility of dignity and fulfillment.”⁸ On the flip side, “proper body pride,” as I argue, involves “overcoming unwarranted shame about one’s own body and valuing all body types, especially stigmatized ones.”⁹ Thus, body positivity means transitioning from limiting body shame to proper body pride. I further explain that there are different avenues toward experiencing *proper* body pride: these may include re-envisioning human beauty or pursuing physical activities for the sake of the pleasure they afford.¹⁰ Manne might object to the idea that we *ought* to feel proper pride about our bodies. But, as I see it, such pride is not a mandate. Rather, it is a description of the lives of those who labor, either individually or in concert with others, to overcome the shaming messages that prevent many from seeing the doctor when in need of medical attention, freely going about everyday activities, wearing what one wants, and so on. As I view things, body positivity functions as a regulative ideal. What would our lives look like if we faced fatphobia and other forms of body oppression? How can we embody this ideal and help others do the same?

Now, if body positivity is compatible with a range of affects regarding one’s body, then Manne’s criticisms seem uncharitable. But I may now be accused of describing

the movement in overly generous terms! Like any good philosophical debate, this discussion reveals the need to be clear about what we take body positivity to entail. The distinction between having a positive body image and the body positivity movement helps us circumscribe the target of Manne's criticisms: the mainstream messaging primarily operant on social media.

Let's now turn to Manne's contention that body reflexivity is superior to body neutrality. As mentioned, her criticisms of body neutrality are several: first, "a truly neutral attitude is hard to maintain" (204); second, body neutrality to some seems "tinged with negativity" (204); third, the position may "imply a blankness that is surely hard to conjure routinely about a subject matter as fraught as our own bodies" (204). Having voiced these concerns, Manne judges that "body neutrality seems at best a precarious retreat from judgment, not a stable resting place" (204). In her rebuttal to body neutrality, Manne urges us to "transcend the mode of assessment entirely" by giving up on evaluating our bodies positively, negatively, or neutrally (205). By appealing to the language of "working" for an individual, Manne harkens to the attitude, often associated with body neutrality, of valuing our bodies for what they can do rather than what they look like. For example, Anne Poirier, the counselor and intuitive eating specialist whose work has been hailed as a turning point in the move from body positivity to body neutrality, states, "Body neutrality prioritizes the body's function, and what the body can do, rather than its appearance."¹¹ Is this emphasis on functionality what Manne means by "working" for oneself? If this is the case, is body reflexivity distinct from neutrality?

To answer these questions, let's pause and study her language more closely. Manne draws a helpful comparison between body reflexivity and her husband's words, "I don't look at you with a critical eye" (205). To use this comparison as a guidepost, we will need to better understand the content of this uncritical gaze. Surely, it contains some sort of apprehension of Manne's body since this is a description of a way of looking at someone. Yet, how should we understand the *affective* character of this gaze (assuming there is one)? If it's not negative (i.e., "critical"), then is it neutral? Or is it even positive? Likewise, wouldn't one's own (uncritical) gaze toward one's body be neutral or positive? Does body reflexivity collapse into the two options Manne has rejected? At first blush, it does not appear we made any progress beyond body positivity or neutrality. But we have. And to see why, I propose taking a step back in time—to a period long before the body positivity vs. neutrality debate—and consider Marilyn Frye's notion of the *loving eye*.

Frye develops the concept of a loving eye in "In and Out of Harm's Way," an essay included in her 1983 classic, *The Politics of Reality*. There, Frye contrasts what she dubs the "arrogant eye" and the "loving eye." For the arrogant perceiver, "everything is either 'for me' or 'against me.' This is the kind of vision that interprets the rock one trips on as hostile, the bolt one cannot unloosen as stubborn, the woman who made meatloaf when he wanted spaghetti as 'bad' (though he didn't say what he wanted)."¹² By contrast, the loving perceiver is "one who knows that to know the

seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination."¹³ This is someone who "can see without the presupposition that the other poses a constant threat or that the other exists for the seer's service."¹⁴ By analogy, a loving perception of someone's body would look at that body without invoking any evaluative categories (such as a "bad body" or a body that's "too fat," and so on). Likewise, it would not expect bodies to conform to one's aesthetic preferences. Perhaps this is how we ought to interpret the "uncritical" gaze Manne attributes to her husband.

Now consider Frye's ideas about the seer's agency and relations to the seen. The arrogant gaze lays the ground for *coercion*, while the loving gaze recognizes the *independence* of the seen. Seeing another as "not good enough" can lead to coercing that person to better suit one's needs. As Frye puts it, the arrogant perceiver "coerces the objects of his perception into satisfying the conditions his perception imposes."¹⁵ In contrast, loving perception makes room for the other—for her to exercise her *autonomy*.

What does this appeal to Frye teach us about body reflexivity? I would argue that body reflexivity could be redescribed as a *loving perception of one's body*. It is not a neutral perception of oneself; it has an affective character. Yet, unlike Frye's loving perceiver, the subject and object of the gaze are the same. To adopt Frye's language, body reflexivity would mean that *one consults one's own will and interests*. This now allows us to connect to Manne's original formulation: "a body is not something good or bad or neutral for people generally, but rather something that may suit and work better or worse for its denizen—in other words, the person who inhabits it" (205). Frye's concept sheds light on the liberatory potential of Manne's view. Looking at oneself with a loving eye means divesting oneself from others' expectations. In fact, the notion of divestment leads us full circle back to Manne's statement: "body reflexivity is tied, as body positivity and body neutrality are not, to a political ethos—a radical politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be fat, or trans, or nonbinary, or queer, or disabled" (205). Whereas the label "body reflexivity" makes Manne's position look like just another one in the body acceptance potpourri, Frye's notion helps us better savor its distinctive political character. Body reflexivity is not merely about appreciating the body's functionality and, as such, it differs from everyday body neutrality. Moreover, by invoking love, I also wanted to add a—dare I say?—positive touch to Manne's "body reflexivity," which, without further commentary, may feel as bland as body neutrality.

Considering this discussion, we have reason to embrace Manne's alternative to body positivity and body neutrality. First, body reflexivity has the merit of avoiding the toxic and coercive elements of conventional body positivity messaging. That said, further research would be needed to situate Manne's proposal alongside more flexible forms of body positivity and to determine where the notion of having a positive body image fits within her framework. Second, body reflexivity has a political dimension that highlights the importance of autonomy in a way that "garden-variety" body positivity and neutrality do not. I hope these reflections will

spur a much-needed conversation about the limits of the body positivity vs. neutrality debate and will help us better theorize resistance to fatphobia and forms of oppression.

NOTES

1. Here, Manne refers to A.W. Eaton’s “Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression” in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Cheryl Frazier’s “Beauty Labor as a Tool to Resist Antifatness,” *Hypatia* 38, no. 2 (2023): 231–50.
2. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, “What Is and What Is Not Positive Body Image?” 127.
3. Wood-Barcalow, Alleva, and Tylka, “Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New,” 6.
4. Wood-Barcalow, Alleva, and Tylka 2024, “Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New,” 7–8.
5. Wood-Barcalow, Alleava, and Tylka, “Revisiting Positive Body Image to Demonstrate How Body Neutrality Is Not New,” 6.
6. Sobczak, *Embody*, 133.
7. Sobczak, *Embody*, 125.
8. Dolezal, *The Body and Shame*, xv; quoted in Leboeuf, “What Is Body Positivity?” 118.
9. Leboeuf, “What Is Body Positivity?” 122.
10. Leboeuf, “What Is Body Positivity?” 123–26.
11. Anne Poirier is quoted in Charlotte Cowles’s article, “Can ‘Body Neutrality’ Change the Way You Work Out? The Key to Staying Active Long Term May Be to Care Less about How You Look and More about How You Feel,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/well/move/body-neutrality-exercise.html>.
12. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.
13. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 75.
14. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 74.
15. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 67.

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Hungry for More Intersectionality: A Review of Unshrinking by Kate Manne

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Overall, *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia* is a successful work of public philosophy. Manne’s (2024) book provides a thorough introduction to fat studies. She engages with a wide range of literature, citing authors who have criticized fatphobia in medicine and epidemiology; to those who work from intersectional positions on race, class, sex/gender, and sexuality; to historical analyses and representations in media and popular culture. She enriches and extends discussions of fatphobia with her interlocutors as she reflects on her experiences of fatphobia throughout her life. Her analysis expertly weaves together the voices of many fat studies scholars and activists, making her conclusions and arguments plausible and intuitive.

As someone who is familiar with the field (and working on my dissertation in the area), I appreciate Manne’s expansive survey on analyses of fatphobia across disciplines and contexts, and admire her ability to extract important ideas, concepts, and themes from various authors and place them in conversation with each other. *Unshrinking* is an accessible work in public-facing philosophy. Manne’s purpose is to challenge the “everyday” fatphobia that affects us all. After she debunks fatphobic beliefs, challenges stereotypes, and explains how individuals in a fatphobic society respond to fatphobia, she presents a moral argument to convince her audience to reflect on how they perpetuate these attitudes in their own actions and discourses. Addressing fatphobia is a project of social justice, and no one deserves to be persecuted for their size. Whereas *Down Girl* offers an original argument with the goal of reconceptualizing “misogyny,” *Unshrinking* recognizes that there is widespread resistance to the fat liberation movement, and it aims to challenge this resistance. Although I was (selfishly) looking forward to the new directions Manne would take fat studies, Manne clearly knows her audience. To ensure these arguments are received, Manne’s decision to share personal experiences and present extensive research supporting her claims will better encourage sympathy from her readers.

In particular, I enjoyed her fourth chapter, “Demoralizing Fatness,” which expertly debunks myths and narratives that condemn fat individuals for their size and consequently entail (either implicitly or explicitly) a duty to lose weight (or stay skinny). In this chapter, Manne argues, “Not being fat is simply not a moral obligation” (83). For one, science has not been able to tell us how to help people reliably lose weight or prevent people from gaining weight: “Weight is at best a proxy for the health concerns that we can, and should, care about” (88). Second, even if fatness is to some extent under people’s control, being fat is not a “burden on the healthcare system” (90). Manne points out the malicious contradiction that fat people face—in our liberal society, individual choice for how one wants to live their best life only seems to apply to skinny (read: *healthy*) people.

Manne finishes the chapter by attempting to explain how disgust, a social behavior, might explain the moralization of fatness in our society. Drawing on psychological research, Manne argues that people frequently mistaken visceral disgust as moral disgust, leading them to harshly judge those that trigger a disgust reaction (95). And, because disgust is an adaptive response, it is socially contagious—people learn and internalize what should elicit a disgust reaction so it can be avoided (97). Manne concludes that this disgust “contagion” motivates people to stay or become skinny at the expense of their own health and, unfortunately, will make efforts to change fatphobic discourses evermore challenging (96, 98). It is an excellent chapter for instructional purposes that I will include in many of my course syllabi.

In *Unshrinking*, Manne discusses many ways that fatphobia intersects with other systems of oppression; however, there is an opportunity for future work to expand on this analysis. Firstly, I suggest that the connection between misogyny and fatphobia is stronger than Manne articulates. In *Unshrinking*, Manne argues fatphobia is used as an “ideological tool” (84) that reinforces other oppressive systems, such as “racism, sexism, misogyny, classism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, and transphobia” (13). She makes the connection between misogyny and fatphobia as follows: “Misogyny . . . finds in fatphobia a powerful and convenient ally: it constructs a ready-to-hand hierarchy among girls and women based on the infinitely gradable metric of body mass, usefully complicated by body shape, breast size, waist-to-hip ratio, and various markers of privilege” (117). In *Down Girl*, Manne argues that misogyny is the “enforcement branch” of the patriarchy, “which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing norms and expectations” of sexist, patriarchal ideologies.¹ The explanatory power of this account moves misogyny beyond that of an individual, women-hating “misogynist” to a structural account where violence is justified to ensure complicit performance of gender norms. So, according to Manne’s account, women who do not demonstrate feminine body standards (of beauty and health) invite (additional) judgment, mistreatment, and violence for refusing to be complicit with patriarchal and/or sizeist norms. Fat is a marker of undesirability, a signifier of a woman’s position in the social “hierarchy” that can be used to derogate her (102), thereby making her easier to control and overpower. These social pressures underscore the structural nature of fatphobia as it reinforces what Manne calls the “straitjacket of fatphobia”: “as a powerful social marker . . . it signals that some bodies should be ignored, disregarded, and mistreated. It marks fat bodies as undeserving of care—and of education, employment, and other basic forms of freedom and opportunity” (17). Consequently, of course, women and girls internalize weight stigma and do everything they can to lose weight and/or avoid getting fat—if successful, they may have an opportunity to improve their rank in the hierarchy and gain (some) privilege. Manne illustrates this point with “sexual fatphobia”—the pressure she experienced as a woman who would “do almost anything to be smaller” out of fear of sexual rejection (101).

While it is important to capture how fatphobia can be weaponized to police gender norms, it seems incomplete to argue that the relationship between fatphobia and gender only functions in this direction. In my own work, I have been thinking about my phenomenological experience as a fat woman who must navigate spaces and environments that are inaccessible for fat and disabled bodies. Interestingly, I’ve come to similar conclusions about gender and fat that Harrison (2021) makes about the relationship between race and fat. Harrison argues that anti-fatness (fatphobia) is anti-Blackness: anti-fatness and anti-Blackness are ideologies that “do not and cannot exist independent of one another.”² Analogously, I think it is worth exploring how fatphobia shapes and is shaped by (cishetero)sexism. As a social construct, Butler theorized how gender is defined and reified through successful gender performance: “our behaviors that are gendered are not innate to us. We learn them, and then we learn to perform them. And this performance is policed and maintained by cisheteronormativity, or the idea that everyone already is—and therefore all things must be seen as—cisgender and heterosexual.”³ Fat prevents individuals from intelligibly performing socially defined gendered norms of the ideal femme body; therefore, gender becomes unintelligible when one cannot (or will not) conform to the body standards expected of a beautiful, curvy-in-all-the-right-places, cishet, white, nondisabled woman. How are women and girls supposed to be “small, meek, and quiet” (3), while “diminish[ing] ourselves dutifully” (10) if our fat (intersectional) bodies are unruly and unable to conform to feminine norms? Fat does not simply work as a tool for gender oppression, but it seems that gender also constructs what counts as fat. As Manne clearly demonstrates through the narratives of her experiences and others in *Unshrinking*, women and girls do not need to be fat to be called fat, treated as fat, or subjected to violence as justified by their embodiment. Even when one considers beauty norms as divorced from weight or size, Manne provides examples that seem to suggest *anti-fatness co-constitutes cisheterosexism*.⁴ If “oppression is always already intersectional,”⁵ then fat is presumably more than an “ideological tool” for intersectional oppression.⁶

My second suggestion for expanding intersectional analyses of fatphobia in *Unshrinking* is to consider intersections with disability theory. *Unshrinking* contains rich discussions of fat as it intersects with race, gender, sexuality, and even class; regrettably however, disability is neglected. Manne discusses Quetelet, an early statistician and eugenicist, as responsible for inspiring the invention of BMI, which became the standard for measuring and classifying certain bodies as “obese” (in particular, it became a racial marker and tool for anti-Black discrimination) (87–88). Notably, Davis (2021) argues that Quetelet’s philosophy was instrumental in the construction of the “norm,” thereby weaponizing early eugenics movements with the ability to identify, marginalize, pathologize, cure, and/or eliminate bodies that deviate from the “normal” (and “ideal”) human form. In other words, the construction of the norm established what physical (and psychological) traits constituted “impairments” that needed to be ameliorated (i.e., “cured”⁷) from the population. The shared history of the creation of the norm to identify weight deviations and other physical and psychological impairments reveals biopolitical

intersections between fatphobia and ableism. Critically, eugenics programs strove to eliminate many different “social ills” from the population: immigrants, the physically disabled, “the feeble-minded, the mentally deficient . . . paupers, criminals, and the sexually promiscuous,”⁸ as well as Indigenous peoples, were all targets of eugenics. It is not a coincidence that the eugenics movement aimed to remove disability, gender, and racial diversity from contemporary society. The epistemic authority of science and medicine in constructing the concept of the norm (i.e., power-knowledge) “created a dominant idea of what the body should be,” which continues to permeate discourses about non-ideal body-minds in contemporary society.⁹ Systems of oppression, as systems of power-knowledge, reinforce each other in the biopolitical control of deviant bodies and the desire to *norm* the population.

The need to include a disability lens in *Unshrinking* is evident when Manne is theorizing about misogyny. After explaining how fatphobia constructs a “hierarchy among women and girls” based on their body size and shape, Manne states, “Some fat activists and advocates say that fatphobia seeks to eliminate fat people: that the prevailing attitude toward fat bodies is essentially genocidal. I’m not denying that this can be the case, but I’m not convinced that it always is. If we [fat people] didn’t exist, there would be significantly fewer people for thinner folks to feel superior to” (117). Although Manne alludes to this shared historical connection between BMI and eugenics (87), I think the absence of a disability lens to contextualize the genocide of fat bodies leads to mistaken conclusions about fatphobia and its intersection with misogyny. Eugenic logic is simultaneously concerned with improving the overall fitness of the population and eliminating certain undesirable traits from a population (often by eliminating the individual with the trait so they cannot pass it on to future generations).¹⁰ Even if eugenic programs, practices, and policies successfully eliminated certain kinds of people from the population, the statistical distribution of traits simply shifts the norm. Therefore, there will always be a deviant expression of a trait as the norm continues to shift. We can imagine a bell curve representing the BMI of all people in a population. Even if we were successful in losing weight across the population, the bell curve would shift, but in doing so it would define a new ideal weight (or weight distribution) that would be as difficult for some bodies to attain.¹¹ This eugenic logic can explain how the socially “ideal” body has become harder to attain—we have resorted to drastic, unnatural, and expensive medical interventions to achieve a thin, yet curvy-in-all-the-right-places body. Even if there are “fewer people for thinner folks to feel superior to” (117), norming a population will inevitably lead to the creation of a new norm and, thus, a new ideal. As Mollow concludes, “the ideal of corporeal agency is laden with ableist implications . . . a root cause of disabled people’s oppression is the threat that we are seen as posing to cultural fantasies of bodily control . . . the ways that *all* subjects fail to embody ableist ideologies of corporeal control” should be taken more seriously in fat studies.¹²

Manne’s narrative through *Unshrinking* parallels disability analyses against medical narratives that construct disability as deviance from a “normal” embodiment.

Like social and political models of disability, fat scholars criticize the medicalization and pathologization of fat as an individual problem that ought to be cured; instead, fatphobic discourses, discrimination, and structural marginalization should be ameliorated. A social approach to fat, like disability, necessarily seeks to challenge cultural discourses and beliefs that subject fat/disabled bodies to marginalization, violence, and harms of society, while also taking into consideration nuances of diverse fat embodiment (e.g., intersectional experiences and different levels of medical intervention wanted/required). Authors like Herndon (2002), Mollow (2015), and Shalk and Kim (2020) argue that fat and disability theory complement and extend theorizing on fat and disabled bodies. For example, bringing a disability lens could strengthen Manne’s conclusions about fat activism and identity politics. Significant work has been done to theorize inclusive social imaginaries that emphasize collective action and allyship from a diverse, intersectional coalition in disability theory. I have only been able to heal my relationship with my body through the power of belonging to a collective, being supported from my fat disability community. An intersectional analysis of fat that discusses every axis other than disability is not truly intersectional. As Harrison argues, “‘Intersect’ implies that they exist on their own and meet at a point,” whereas a truly intersectional analysis explores how systems of oppression reinforce each other.¹³ Disability theory would bring additional nuance to Manne’s argument.

After *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* and *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*, I expected Manne to deliver a clearly and accessibly written critique of the patriarchy with interwoven narratives about contemporary and relevant examples to make her argument. While Manne’s *Unshrinking* undoubtedly met these expectations, the autoethnographical nature of the book was completely unexpected. Even though I was aware Manne was using philosophy to unpack her relationship with her body (I attended some early talks Manne gave on the book and have been following her on X/Twitter for the past five years), I was surprised by her vulnerability and openness to share some of the experiences she described in *Unshrinking*. Sharing her fraught journey to heal her internalized fatphobia, Manne invites her reader to join her journey by reflecting and challenging their own fatphobic attitudes and biases.

While some philosophers may criticize this book for being too personal and partial (some may even go as far to say this is not “philosophy”),¹⁴ I genuinely appreciate Manne’s candor. Like Manne, I have been using my dissertation to understand my own experiences of fatphobia, accept my body, and dismantle my internalized fatphobia. Manne’s brave vulnerability (in following with the fat authors she cites, like Harrison, Gordon, Strings, Taylor, and more) gives me the courage to be personal and intimate in my own work, despite the attitudes and norms of the discipline. Of course, this is not to say that published philosophy, primarily in the feminist tradition, has not been personal. I think the personal experiences described in the canon feminist papers is what makes them continually relevant (for instance, Brison’s [1993] paper philosophizing about

her sexual assault). However, as Manne articulates in *Unshrinking*, philosophy (and academia more generally) communicates “that not only are fat bodies a moral and sexual problem; they are an intellectual problem too” (121). Even as a feminist, Manne and others have highlighted how this attitude seeps into feminist philosophy.¹⁵ Occupying a fat body can result in an epistemic injustice—your credibility as a knower of your own experience and expertise are dismissed, challenged, ignored. *Unshrinking* has given me a new confidence in my philosophical projects on fat. Speaking from my own experience, I understand the energy it takes to philosophize about issues that are personal.¹⁶ So I thank Manne for sharing her journey and for amplifying the voices of fat scholars and activists who, in virtue of their size and intersections, might not receive the attention or acclaim they deserve.

NOTES

1. Manne, *Down Girl*, 78.
2. Harrison, *Belly of the Beast*, in Sperry, “Anti-Blackness as Anti-Fatness: An Interview with Da’Shaun L. Harrison.”
3. Harrison, *Belly of the Beast*, 86.
4. To draw another comparison, Manne discusses String’s (2019) account of how BMI established race as an unhealthy ideal. Similarly, however, the creation of body mass index (BMI) as a tool to measure one’s fatness historically excluded non-men and has been criticized as sexist and transphobic (Fuller, “Using BMI to Measure Your Health Is Nonsense. Here’s Why”; Bright, “Critiquing and Resisting the Medical Construction of Sexist Bodily Norms”).
5. Rodier, “Rethinking Fat Studies,” 15.
6. For example, Harrison argues “fatness functions as a gender of its own. Fatness fails, and therefore disrupts, the foundation on which gender is built” (102). This argument sketches fat as more than a tool for gendered violence but as co-constituting fatphobia and gender oppression.
Furthermore, it occurred to me that Manne’s analysis would have benefitted from a Foucauldian framework. Manne’s analysis does suggest biopower and governmentality; for instance, the “straitjacket of fatphobia” reveals how fatphobic discourses are internalized and used to govern our relationships with our body, food, exercise, etc., and, of course, medicine’s influence on healthism, pathologization, and individual responsibility on the discipline of fat bodies. Restructuring the analysis through this lens may help explain the deeply intersectional relationship between fat, gender, race, and class.
7. The social construction of disability as physical or psychological impairments “fram[e] disability as a medical problem lodged in individual body-minds, which need to be treated or cured” (Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection*, 8).
8. Wilson and St. Pierre, “Disability and Eugenics,” 98–99.
9. Davis, “Disability, Normality, and Power,” 3.
10. Davis, “Disability, Normality, and Power”; Wilson and St. Pierre, “Disability and Eugenics.”
11. It is also important to recognize that eugenic programs and policies are not always effective in removing the targeted trait from the population. Elsewhere, I am arguing that, in the case of fat, the drastic measures to eliminate fat from the population (e.g., bariatric surgery, semaglutides, restrictive dieting, overexercising, etc.) which to weight cycling is a form of eugenics. These measures, coupled with internalizing fatphobia, is worse for one’s health than staying fat and leads to higher morbidity and mortality. Further, I think there are interesting analogies that can be drawn between the moral panic instigated by the historical eugenics movement and the moral panic driving the discourse of the “obesity epidemic.”
12. Mollow, “Disability Studies Gets Fat,” 211, emphasis in original.

13. Sperry, “Anti-Blackness as Anti-Fatness.”
14. Manne anticipates this response in her book when she describes not being recognized as a philosopher (*Unshrinking*, 119). In recent years, some philosophers have criticized the discipline for its lack of diversity. Jones (“Philosophy for Everyone”) argues that the discipline’s resistance to diversify can be (at least partly) attributed to the norm of practice policing which projects count as “real” philosophy. Regrettably, feminist philosophy (even without the use of anecdotal experiences to support an argument) still fights for legitimacy in many institutions and departments.
15. Rodier, “Rethinking Fat Studies”; Mollow, “Disability Studies Gets Fat.”
16. I cannot fathom the anxiety that comes with publishing a book on fatphobia for a general audience who is likely not as sympathetic to or knowledgeable about this topic, and inviting backlash that could be worse than *Down Girl* (see *Unshrinking*; Manne 2024, 4).

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The Fallacies and Figleaves of Fatphobia: Expanding on Arguments in Manne's Unshrinking

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Many years ago, I attended an academic conference and found myself having a conversation with one of the brightest MA students I have ever met. Even though he was already presenting alongside tenured faculty at a professional conference, he expressed nervousness about his future in academia. Upon further discussion, it was revealed he was nervous that no one would ever take him seriously as a fat man. I assured him he was clearly very smart, confident, and hard-working, as well as doing all the right things. He sighed, signifying the underlying reality, that no matter how much he would prove himself intellectually, fat bias was going to make success harder to achieve. It was not impossible, of course, but being fat meant the relevant bias would be a hurdle, especially because most of the bias is implicit, hidden from those who were still acting upon it. "I have never been able to lose weight, so this is how it is going to be."

This seemed so unfair and highly unreasonable. But as a mid-fat woman myself, I understood what he meant.

In this critical response to Kate Manne's 2024 book *Unshrinking*, I will focus on issues raised in the chapter "Small Wonder." In this chapter, Manne explores fat stigma in academia, primarily in philosophy. Her argument focuses on the history and practices of fatphobia in philosophical works, from Plato and Aristotle to contemporary philosophical work, adding to her overall moral argument throughout the book: fatphobic beliefs and their accompanying behaviors violate dignity of persons and is morally bad. I wish to further her arguments here in a different direction. I argue that not only does fat stigma violate dignity, but fatphobic beliefs and their accompanying actions also perpetuate bad reasoning, bad rhetoric, and thought clichés, the very things that should be anathema to our profession. If you are not persuaded by Manne's moral arguments and find yourself thinking arguments about epistemic injustice are nothing but "liberal bunk," this addition to Manne's thesis might give you pause. By pointing out the bad reasoning endemic to fatphobia, I show it to be a threat to the health of one's critical thinking skills. *And aren't you worried about your health?*

First, I briefly revisit two of Manne's arguments in "Small Wonder," while fortifying them with the work of Aubrey Gordon.¹ Next, I connect the underlying assumptions made in fatphobic thinking and action to informal fallacies. Lastly, I show how fatphobic rhetoric is also connected to what Jennifer Saul has dubbed figleaves. By presenting both the fallacies and figleaves about health and weight, I show that fatphobic thought and action is not just unethical, but a detriment to the philosophical tradition. The inability to think critically about our beliefs and hiding bad reasoning under figleaves undermines the practice of doing philosophy well.

1. SUMMARIZING "SMALL WONDER"

In this chapter, Manne focuses on the problem of fatphobia in academia. She writes that this chapter is "an examination of fatphobia" in her own field "which . . . can serve as a lens, indeed, a magnifying glass, for something larger: the way we think the minds housed in fatter bodies are less than, even stupid" (121). She speaks to how, in academia, fat bodies are seen as a "sign of intellectual failure" (121). She covers how fat bodies are used as "props" in thought experiments in ethics courses, such as the variation of the Trolley Scenario "Fat Man,"² the misreading of Plato and Aristotle on gluttony, the intersection of fatness and the feminine as being categorized as anti-rational, and how issues in epistemic injustice and entitlement play a role in fatphobia.

All of these contribute to her argument that fatphobic behavior is morally bad. The explicit expression of the bias is best shown in Manne's example of the now-deleted Tweet from a psychology professor, which reads, "Dear PhD applicants, if you don't have the will power to stop eating carbs, you won't have the will power to do your dissertation. #truth" (133).³ He did apologize later, saying it did not represent his university or his own PhD applicant selection criterion. But he's wrong about that: it clearly does represent the general biased views held in academic departments and circles about the nature of fat, health, willpower, and intellectual abilities of students (and future possible faculty). This bias contributes to the academic culture which denies fat subjects' basic dignity, Manne argues, in that it leads to seeing fat bodies as "good evidence that" their "mind is lacking" (140). Instead of seeing fat bodies as individual persons, they are treated as "pitiably," "unhealthy," or as less rational/more physical, lacking in willpower, and less disciplined than thin bodies (or the minds within thin bodies).

I further this argument by asking which party in this academic milieu is being more rational? I argue here that holding fatphobic beliefs and acting upon them is a sign of poor critical thinking and arises when little to no reflective work is being done. In this next section, with the help of Manne and Aubrey Gordon, I identify the most prevalent informal fallacies underlying fatphobic rhetoric, often spoken by those who consider themselves "more rational."

2. THE FALLACIES OF FATPHOBIA

Manne writes that fat persons are perceived as lacking willpower and discipline (129–33, 175–78). She shares not only the Tweet mentioned earlier, but also shares examples of someone choosing cake over a peach from Nagel's paper "Free Will" and Pinker's example of an "irrational doofus who prefers the 'small pleasure' of having lasagna now-rather than steamed vegetables" (132).⁴ The topic of fat persons lacking various forms of self-control is covered in Gordon's book *You Just Need to Lose Weight and 19 Other Myths about Fat People*. Chapter 9 argues against the commonly held belief that "fat people are emotionally damaged and cope by eating their feelings."⁵ The beliefs that follow from these assumptions are that thin persons are in control of their willpower, as well as in control of their emotions, or at least in more control than fat persons. Fat persons generally are said to be lacking in discipline

too. Gordon writes, “frameworks around ‘emotional eating’ ignore the fact that even in the absence of major trauma or emotional challenges, fat people still exist. . . . While all the studies cited in this chapter offer a scientific study of correlation, it is only that: a correlation.”⁶ Gordon cites many peer-reviewed scientific sources throughout her work to show this.⁷ Fat persons eat for many reasons, as does any person: holidays, celebrations, taste, experiences, or even straight-up hunger. There is no scientifically verified connection made between all fat bodies and lack of willpower over food or emotional eating. Notice that I state that it is not for all fat bodies; we can postulate that some fat bodies may have this connection. But to generalize all fat bodies would be rather hasty.

We have come to the first of our handful of fatphobic fallacies: confusing correlation with causation. This informal fallacy occurs when one concludes based solely on the order of events, rather than looking to the myriad other factors that ought to be considered for accuracy and clarity. We often overlook those other factors as they might rule out the connection we desire to make.⁸ In this case, we miss many more important factors in what makes certain bodies fat. Yes, caloric intake can account for some cases of weight gain, but this factor alone is not the only explanation of A (abundance of calories) causing B (a fat body), or that the lack of willpower leads to being fat. With a little responsible research and critical thinking, it is apparent that other features are the main factors in the creation of various body sizes: genes, hormones, environment. And these factors are not chosen nor “corrected” by willpower or discipline. And yes, let us not forget that to judge all fat bodies as being fat for the same reason would also qualify as a hasty generalization, as hinted at in the previous paragraph. To judge one or two fat persons as having quality X, and to extrapolate all fat persons have quality X, especially when that quality is often not fully understood by the person making the judgment, that person risks making a faulty representation of the whole class.

Another issue Manne addresses is the problem of “lose weight and look smarter” (134). There is a prevalence of the connection between being thin and being perceived as smart, and points to how one is encouraged to lose weight to succeed in academics. This issue can be seen in the opening story about the MA student. This can also be seen in the hypothetical-fat-graduate-student-chiding Tweet. Not only is one perceived as lacking willpower and discipline if they are fat, but it is also assumed one lacks intelligence. Manne links this fatphobic assumption to the negative bias against feminine bodies (read as soft and weak). She writes, “fatness and femininity remain a liability . . . shrink or be belittled” (134–35). But the idea that one’s body alone can tell us about their intellect is absurd. “There’s nothing inevitable about the idea that the brightest minds tend to be housed in thin bodies” (137–38). Manne tells of a snide remark at the girth of David Hume in a textbook, which commented that “the lightness and quickness of his mind was entirely hidden by the lumpishness of his appearance” (123).⁹

If a person believes the fat content of bodies has a connection to their critical thinking capacities, whose

critical thinking is deficient? There is no causal link between the size of a body and the critical thinking skills housed in those bodies.

At this time, I would like to address a possible retort: “Well, if fat academic hopefuls don’t like it, they can just lose weight.”¹⁰

“Just losing weight” to be treated with dignity is clearly not a reply to Manne’s moral argument. Persons deserve to be treated as persons at any weight. The categorical imperative does not just apply to those under a size 10. But also, losing a considerable amount of weight is not a real possibility for most fat persons. Gordon explains why this response is clearly an uninformed opinion about fat bodies and not based in an empirically informed reality. She writes, “research indicates that our endocrine systems, not our willpower, are significant mechanisms that determine, in part, whether we feel the drive to eat . . . our body weights are ‘tightly regulated by hormonal, metabolic, and neural factors,’ factors that ‘appear to depend on an individual’s highest sustained body weight.’”¹¹ Again, weight loss is not achieved through willpower alone (or at all) or the calories in, calories out mantra.¹² The human body is a complex open system with many parts working together. “If you don’t like it, lose weight” is akin to telling a person that if they want to have more time, they should stop sleeping (175).

Needing sleep to function is not a failure of the intellect; it is a biological function. Needing lasagna to nourish yourself is not a sign of failure of the intellect; it is a sign of being biologically alive. Some bodies need more sleep, some less. Some bodies need more food, some need less. Diets not working is not a sign of intellectual failure, but a sign that diets don’t work for most persons in the long run. This is an empirical fact. To argue that a fat body is the sign of an intellectual failure is a category error, especially if one is dualist, an issue Manne also addresses.

To see a fat body and to “know” it to be damaged, irrational, unhealthy is a sign of another fallacy: false authority. In this fallacy, we see non-experts acting as those with actual expertise, namely, experts on research in fat, genetics, diet, nutrition, and socio-economic factors that impact the body, when they clearly are lacking such expertise.¹³ If a person assumes to understand complex biological functions of a person they do not intimately know, on top of claiming to know that person’s complex medical history, to use that assumed “knowledge” make sweeping medical and/or value judgments or prescriptions smacks of the false authority fallacy. Barking at strangers that “it’s just calories in, calories out” and position it is “just science” suggests this fallacy as well. Are you a specialist in metabolic functions in the human body and know intimate details about the person’s body in question? If so, perhaps you might be reasonably able to assert something about how calories work in that body or similar ones. But most persons proclaiming this authority are not working in labs with specialists but picking up fruits out of grocery carts and saying “this is high in calories” to fat persons.¹⁴ Philosophers are experts in many things, but metabolic functions, hormones, digestion, genetics, and fat, are not usually our specialty. And continuing to appeal to outdated

science to make these proclamations only make us even worse authorities, as we are appealing to other false authorities in our claims.¹⁵

"Can't we even be concerned about the health of others?! It is like we can't say anything anymore!" some might cry out. Well, this figleaf is for you.

3. THE FIGLEAVES OF FATPHOBIA

If we are a person committed to the moral arguments Manne has made in her book, we might wonder if anything is wrong, then, for caring about another person's health. Sounds like the right thing to do, right?

One must revisit the fallacy of false authority once more, as well as confusing correlation with causation, and perhaps even false or oversimplified cause. Are you an authority on the subject's health you are concerned for? Also, are you sure of the causal chain linking that subject's health to their weight? Chances are they are not connected.¹⁶ And shifting the focus to worrying about the health of a subject as a moral concern is missing the point (*ignorato elenchi*) of Manne's argument. Moral consideration is given regardless of the health of the person. Full stop. But if one still believes that one should be worried about a fat person's health as a moral imperative, I argue that this might be a motivated missing the point in the form of what I call a fatphobic figleaf. I briefly reference Gordon's writing on "concern trolling" for fat people's health and then move on to apply Jennifer Saul's concept of racial figleaves to the issue of fatphobia.

In part two of Gordon's book *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, she tackles the various forms of "concern" for fat persons' health: that obesity causes death, that the BMI is an objective measure of health, doctors are unbiased in their evaluations of fat bodies, and fat people must be damaged.¹⁷ These are all myths she dispels. But the overall message is clear: there is very little legitimate concern for fat persons' health behind all these beliefs. She writes that "concern trolling is the Trojan horse of anti-fatness."¹⁸ If the health of fat people were truly the issue, focus would shift on fighting fat stigma in healthcare so that health concerns of fat persons were not simply dismissed by telling a fat patient "you just need to lose weight."¹⁹ If one was truly committed to epistemic justice for fat bodies, you would listen to fat people when they shared stories of abuse and cruelty towards them instead of saying, "I am sure they meant well when they told you to lose weight," or "How could he have raped you? Fat women don't get raped."²⁰ I would add that these "concern for your health" statements are now so prevalent that they qualify as thought clichés, but a very pernicious form of a thought cliché that is a figleaf for fatphobia.

Jennifer Saul writes about what she calls "racial figleaves" in Chapter 3 of her 2024 book, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves: How Manipulative Language Spreads Racism and Falsehood*. She writes that racial figleaves are "an utterance that provides cover for another utterance that—without the figleaf—would be recognized as racist."²¹ The most obvious examples would be "I'm not racist but . . ." or "Some of my best friends are black." She distinguishes two types of

figleaves: synchronic, which happens at the same time as the utterance, and diachronic, which appears as a means of defending a previous utterance. Referencing the previous example of the fatphobic tweet, the diachronic figleaf takes the form of "that doesn't represent me."²²

Saul writes that racist figleaves only convince those who believe racism can only be explicit and violent, and it is that sort of audience racist figleaves can convince that racist content is not actually racist. She writes for those convinced by figleaves that "only the most blatant, obvious, and monstrous" are racist, while those who understand the varieties of racism in everyday life will be unconvinced. But those figleaves are not for those who understand racism more complexly, but for those who think racism is only one sort of extreme phenomenon. The rest of us find racist figleaves a dangerous rhetorical tool and evidence of racism.

We can apply this analysis to statements like "What about your health?" Much like those familiar with the racism behind, "I'm not racist but racist statement X," we can also hear that mirrored in "I'm not fatphobic but fat people just need to lose weight" or "I'm not anti-fat, but I'm just worried about your health." Fatphobic figleaves like this are a red herring to distract from fatphobia to hide it from others in earshot, and perhaps, also from the speaker themselves. Those who are knowledgeable about the pervasiveness of fatphobia are not fooled. But fatphobic figleaves are for those who imagine fatphobia to only be blatant, violent, or explicit, not language of care and concern. And sadly, fatphobic figleaves make noticing one's own expressions of fatphobic rhetoric hard to hear, even coming from one's own mouth.

Saul says the use of figleaves is dangerous as it unconsciously coerces "a cooperative conversational participant" into "accepting these claims."²³ If no one speaks up, "the norms for that context shift so that racist speech becomes permissible."²⁴ And often, people notice blatant racism, but when delivered by a figleaf, it enters barely noticed by most, becomes normalized, and over time, more extreme.²⁵

One way to combat these figleaves is to question the package that ideas are being delivered to you in via language. "I'm just worried about your health": let us break this thought cliché figleaf. Ask "Are you concerned about any other person's health in this room? Why not?" or "Person X rode a motorcycle to this event, so are you equally worried about their health?" or "Does a person's health matter morally to you? If so, why?" or "What do you know about that person's health apart from their appearance?"

4. CONCLUSION

In the third episode of season sixteen of *The Simpsons*, Lisa Simpson becomes convinced she is fat and restricts her eating and begins exercising constantly while also recognizing that this behavior is fatphobic and antifeminist. At the end of the episode, Lisa understands the difficulty of her position: to be stuck worrying about her weight while also understanding how unreasonable diet culture and

fatphobia is. Homer pleads with his daughter to wrap up the episode with a happy moral lesson.

Homer: And Lisa, what have you learned?

Lisa: Nothing. Like many women, I still have an unhealthy obsession with my weight.

Homer: But talking about the problem is the first step towards a solution, right?

Lisa: I guess. But there's a long way to go.²⁶

This episode aired in 2004. Since then, we have come a long way thanks to the effort of fat rights activists questioning fatphobia and fat discrimination in healthcare, the workplace, and in everyday life. And we can do better in academics when we think harder about our default settings and suppositions by critically analyzing our thoughts and actions to see how rational they are and how well-informed they are. The work of philosophers like Manne paves the way for this practice.

Many of us philosophers can do better. We have been trained to do better. Questioning fatphobia is required not just morally but intellectually. This is what rigorous philosophical inquiry looks like, and we should aim for nothing less.

NOTES

1. Manne does use Gordon's work in her book, but I will be highlighting sections for this project's sake.
2. In my ethics courses, I update this to "The Rock" Trolley Problem. I cannot help but add here that according to the highly problematic BMI, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and other wrestlers like "Stone Cold" Steve Austin are categorized as obese. See <https://www.menshealth.com/weight-loss/a19537796/the-problem-with-bmi/>.
3. *You know it must be true when it's #truth.*
4. *Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels, eh, Pinker?*
5. Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 73–81.
6. Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 77.
7. One of the most enjoyable to read is Giles Yeo's book, *Gene Eating: The Science of Obesity and the Truth About Dieting*.
8. A fallacy that plagues many academic disciplines, sadly, as we really desire that our connections are simple and straightforward.
9. *His brilliant mind was hidden? Where?* Many persons, including myself, find his brilliance everywhere. Hume is better described as one of the most brilliant philosophers of all time, a value judgment I agree with.
10. I would like to say that this retort is a case of me committing the strawman fallacy of the opponent, but as many fat persons can attest to, this is a common reply to fat persons asking for equal and fair consideration or treatment. Gordon writes that saying life will just be easier if you get thin is like saying life would be easier for you if you get straight, or act whiter, or conform to gender norms. Gordon, *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 81. For an example of the issue of "sounding white" and the bias against "sounding black," see Martin Abel and Rulof Berger, "Unpacking Name-Based Race Discrimination," *IZA Discussion Paper No. 16254*, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4490163>.
11. Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 15.
12. See Yeo's 2021 Royal Institution lecture "How We Got the Science of Weight Loss Wrong" for more information, along with his other publications. And, yes, even doctors can be ill-informed about

the nature of calories, diet, exercise, and weight, as they might not specialize in these systems.

13. This is also related to the problem of epistemic entitlement. Manne address this issue in *Unshrinking and Entitled* (2020).
14. Again, I'd like to say I was committing the strawman fallacy, but I am not. See Gordon, *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 71–73.
15. Yes, our focus on calories is antiquated science in health and weight. See Yeo, but also, Stacey, "This Doctor Pioneered Counting Calories a Century Ago, and We're Still Dealing with the Consequences."
16. Do not take this to mean there are no unhealthy states connected to weight of both higher and lower values, but that fat does not entail unhealthy absolutely as well as thin entails healthy. Do not be so either/or about bodies and their health.
17. I referenced this argument earlier in this work.
18. Gordon, *What We Don't talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 78.
19. For a heartbreaking examples of how fatphobic practices in medicine are harmful, see Gordon, *You Just Need to Lose Weight*, 63–70.
20. See Gordon, *What We Don't Talk about When We Talk about Fat*, 99–107 for more on the pervasive problem of believing fat bodies as victims of sexual assault.
21. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 71.
22. Then who does it represent, I wonder. . . . I do acknowledge that it might be up for debate whether certain apologies can count as a form of a diachronic figleaf.
23. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 85.
24. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 85.
25. Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*, 87.
26. John Vitti, writer, *The Simpsons*, Season 16, Episode 3, "Sleeping with the Enemy," November 21, 2004.

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The Future of Facing Fatphobia

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As a longtime fan of Kate Manne’s work, I will admit (perhaps embarrassingly) that my copy of *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia* has come to resemble a kindergartener’s art project. It is doused with colorful sticky notes, highlighted passages, and marginalia, much of which involves exclamations of relief. This relief is not only because Manne beautifully brings together fat scholars and activists into conversation with philosophy, but also because she does so with clear love and care. As I thumbed back through these notes some months after my initial read, I was particularly struck by a comment Manne makes in the introduction of her book. She writes,

I believe that when it comes to fatphobia, the solution is not to improve our self-image or love our bodies better. It is nothing less than to *remake the world* to properly fit fat bodies, and to effect the socially transformative recognition that there is truly nothing wrong with us. (9)

This quote is particularly telling, and subtly captures many of the strengths of Manne’s project that I wish to focus on in this paper.

1. FAT COMMUNITIES AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCERS

Manne follows this passage with a call to action, a rallying cry to “resist the fatphobia that has oppressed, controlled, and constrained us, for the sake of ourselves and—most importantly—still larger people” (9). I have been fat my entire life, but have existed at various points on the so-called “Fat Spectrum,” popularized and expanded on by Ash Nischuk (2016). I currently vacillate between superfat and infinifat, meaning I fall on the furthest end of this spectrum—a fact which heavily influences both how I navigate my daily life and my experiences with fatphobia. I mention this because, as someone who exists in the far-regions of fatness, I was taken aback by (and tremendously grateful for) Manne’s repeated acknowledgements of the vastness of fat embodiment and experience. *Unshrinking* shines in part because Manne is able to offer an incredibly rich, vulnerable look into her own life and experiences with anti-fatness, but also because she recognizes that *her* fat experience is not *the* fat experience (and, in fact, that *there is no singular* “fat experience”).

Manne’s comments that we must resist fatphobia, especially for the sake of those who are most harmed by it, speak to her clear commitment to do work with and for the fat community. In the excerpt from her introduction, it is not accidental that Manne proclaims that “there is truly nothing wrong with **us**” (9, emphasis added). *Unshrinking* puts into action Charlotte Cooper’s commitment (one which I share) that “fat people should be recognized as important knowledge producers [about fatness, and that] academics and policy-makers of all sizes should support fat people

in claiming space to produce that knowledge.”¹ Given the limitations of Manne’s own identities, and the wide variety of experiences one might have with fatphobia depending on their place on the fat spectrum and other identities that may render them more likely to be harmed by anti-fat oppression, Manne’s book deserves praise for the level of care she put into advocating for the most marginalized in our fat communities.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY REFLEXIVITY

The most striking takeaway from *Unshrinking*, for me, was Manne’s notion of “body reflexivity.” An alternative mindset from body positivity or body neutrality, body reflexivity is a radical adjustment of our relationships to our own bodies—an affirmation that our bodies are our own, and that we exist for “ourselves, and no one else” (196). In order to push back at the cultural imperatives forced upon us by anti-fatness and diet culture, body reflexivity asks us to instead understand our bodies as existing for us, on our own terms. Refreshingly, body reflexivity “does not prescribe any particular evaluative stance towards one’s form,” instead allowing us the freedom to exist in our bodies and to have autonomy over them. With body reflexivity we must embrace a “radical politics of autonomy” (205) that we extend to ourselves and others, stepping back from a culture that has taught us to investigate and scrutinize others (whether negatively or positively). If my body is my own, so too is your body your own.

This notion of body reflexivity is needed as much now as it has ever been, especially as fat people are subject to heightened scrutiny in the face of a new wave of weight-loss drugs like Ozempic, which have resulted in increased body surveillance and pressures to lose weight. With a new possibility for weight loss, fat people are now put in even more of a bind to perform within others’ expectations—whether while fat or while intentionally pursuing weight loss.

A recent Instagram post by singer Lizzo reveals this, as a video of her highlighting different styles of workout clothing for her line, Yitty, was barraged by comments speculating about the means of her weight loss. While Lizzo has spoken some, more vaguely, about focusing on her health during a brief hiatus from making music, she has not (to my knowledge) explicitly mentioned intentionally losing weight. “Ozempic queeeen,” one user wrote, while another commented, “Why is it anytime someone loses weight yall say they’re taking weight loss medicine and/or surgery?! . . . Ppl still do it the old fashioned way, ya know.”² Although many messages seem both supportive of Lizzo’s assumed weight loss *and* of her former, larger body, they have in common that they assume some kind of authority to speculate on another person’s body—one which body reflexivity says we do not have. I think this notion of body reflexivity plays an important role in the future of fatness, but that it must be approached with great care and nuance if it is to be successful in helping address fatphobia.

3. THE WEIGHT OF OUR WORDS

As we try to build a world in which our bodies are truly our own, how we speak about ourselves (and one another) is crucial. As I survey the literature on fatness, I am

routinely struck by how much of it focuses on fatphobia—on understanding and only discussing fat people in conversations about how we are oppressed (and how this is unjust). This is an important conversation to have, but also an exhausting one. As a lifelong fat person, recognizing and challenging anti-fatness seemingly engulfs my life and others’ interests in it (at least insofar as this identity is discussed within the Academy).

My worry, to put it differently, is that often when we discuss fatness, we do so from an almost defensive stance. Much of the literature on fatness starts from a point of aiming to dispel myths around fatness—trying to offer careful, compelling reasons that it can be *okay* (that is, that it is not necessarily a moral failing) to be fat. This is an understandable starting point, which can serve dual purposes. First, it can help encourage those (both straight-sized and fat) who live in deeply anti-fat societies to resist the dogma they have been wrongly taught to uphold. Second, it can help console fat people who far too often have been told there *is* something wrong with them in virtue of their weight.

I take Manne’s project to be addressing both of these goals. She introduces the book by highlighting that fatphobia, understood as a type of structural oppression, is unjust (11). In tackling the many myths surrounding fatphobia (12–13) that pervade our common understanding, Manne asks us all to work towards a brighter future—a future in which we no longer need to deny our hunger, nor give up our autonomy. My worry is in starting this conversation with what I see as a more “defensive” aim.

To be clear, I recognize the importance of addressing this systemic oppression as Manne does (following in a tradition of many other invaluable authors, like Da’Shaun L. Harrison, Roxane Gay, Marquisele Mercedes, Aubrey Gordon, and Tressie McMillan Cottom). Until we have dismantled that unjust system and unlearned the harmful biases and stereotypes that accompany it, we need to keep working towards fat liberation. Focusing exclusively on beauty or self-love will not save us—as Manne has compellingly explained in the very passage I highlighted at the beginning of this essay.

As a lifelong fat person, my life has been riddled with (and made worse by) the very consequences of anti-fatness that Manne addresses. I was first bullied for my weight in kindergarten, and I was given my first diet book by a relative as a Christmas gift when I was just eight years old. I have been denied medical care for everything from ear infections to tumors to arthritis, all because of my weight—and in the few times when I was afforded any care at all, doctors failed to take seriously my symptoms or past diagnoses, often leading to what could be described most charitably as medical malpractice.

Discussing the harms of fatphobia is a laudable and important conversation. But as I’ve continued to write on and think about fatness over the past few years, I’ve longed for more. It is exhausting to have so much of your identity, experience, and others’ recognition of your life to be centered around the harms you face in virtue of that

identity. There is a crucial difference between starting the conversation from a place of “there is nothing wrong with being fat, contrary to popular belief,” as opposed to one of saying “there is so much *right*—so much that is valuable—about being fat.”

4. (RE)FRAMING THE FUTURE OF FATNESS

My main worry with Manne’s piece—which, to be clear, is a response that is not unique to her book so much as it is a response to the overall state of literature on fatness in academic philosophy³—is with where she begins this conversation. Manne has done the important work, following in a long history of scholars in *Fat Studies*, of demonstrating that fatphobia is unjust. Moreover, much of Chapter 6 of *Unshrinking*, titled “Small Wonder,” focuses on Manne’s incisive explanation of the unique ways that anti-fatness is manifested within academic philosophy specifically. This gives us a long overdue opportunity to reckon with what traditions and biases we have carried on in the field—the very kind of critical, careful reflection that we often train our students to extend to countless other facets of our lives.

In the spirit of doing this reflection on our discipline as a whole, it would serve us well to take a step back and think carefully about how we frame conversations surrounding fatness. If our true goal is fat liberation—something which must be done, in part, through adopting a politic of body reflexivity—then we should think carefully about how we begin to talk about fatness. So many of these conversations begin in trying to prove that there is nothing *wrong* with being fat, and that our widespread discrimination against fat people is unjust. These conversations are typically done with an underlying commitment that fat people are valuable. (After all, if they did not have value, then we would have less reason to take seriously the harms fat people face as a result of fatphobia.) But as we think about where to move forward as a philosophical community post-*Unshrinking*, it would serve us well to bring this value to the forefront of our conversations about fatness.

I wonder what other futures are possible for us. In seeking true fat liberation and justice, how can we make space for a radical celebration of fatness? In what ways do we hold space to recognize and honor the benefits of being fat, rather than merely reflecting on this identity with a more defensive starting point (against fatphobia)?

To be fair to her project, Manne does end *Unshrinking* by declaring that fat is valuable, despite taking what I’ve described as a defensive starting point. She explains,

Fatness can be beautiful, sure, but I think that is the least of it. It can be arresting, provocative, comforting, protective, and deeply countercultural. . . . Fatness, in other words, is something to *value*. If all or even most fat people took the magic weight-loss pill we’re imagining, something important would be lost. . . . We would be collectively diminished inasmuch as fatness was eliminated or even rendered a rarity. (190–91)

Drawing parallels between being fat and being trans, Manne frames fatness as a “valid and indeed valuable way of being in the world” (199). My curiosity, however, lays in how philosophy might look were this more often the starting point of our conversations about fatness.

As philosophers, we are trained to believe that our words *matter*—the specific ways we do (and do not) frame a project *say something* about our values and commitments. In highlighting not just that being fat is “okay” in some neutral (and, as I’ve framed it, defensive stance against fatphobia), and instead more robustly asserting that it is valuable in this more positive sense, we reveal our commitments as scholars. And as someone who takes herself to be committed (as Manne is) to fat liberation, it is this positive framing that I find so greatly needed in conversations surrounding fatness moving forward. I suspect that this framing could also help deepen the significance of Manne’s idea of body reflexivity.

5. GLORIFYING FATNESS

In the spirit of doing philosophy about fatness *by* and *with* fat people, we can and should push ourselves further in how we talk about fat, highlighting not just that it’s *not bad* to be fat, but that it can be glorious. This is not to say, of course, that being fat is *only* positive—nor is it to prescribe a particular attitude that individual fat people ought to take towards themselves and their own bodies (something which Manne argues is overly burdensome and out of reach for many of us) (202). Instead, it is a call to address our *collective* understandings of fatness (as opposed to our individual relationships to our own—possibly fat—bodies).

A. W. Eaton proposes that one way of addressing anti-fatness is to replace a learned disgust towards fat bodies with a more positive sentiment through aestheticizing those bodies.⁴ Especially if we are to take this approach seriously, framing more conversations around fatness from this more positive starting point seems vitally important.

When I first came to fat liberation, I struggled to fully commit to the movement. I had long struggled with my fatness, at points quite literally starving myself in an effort to shrink my body (much like Manne herself shares of her own experience in *Unshrinking*). The thing that helped me more fully change my mindset was seeking out and embracing the good parts of my fat body, learning to see it as a home, rather than as a death sentence (as I’d been told I should see it my entire life). This project of making a home in my body—what I would now, thanks to Manne, think of as a work of body reflexivity—involved thinking of the small wonders and joys my body had brought me throughout the years. It started with recalling how loved I felt in middle school, in the final days of school, where my friends and I hid in the corners of our math classroom killing time before the end of the school year. How many times had my friends rested their heads in my lap or on my chest, using my flesh as a pillow, a safe place to land? If it could be that for them, why couldn’t it have that same positive value for myself?

Hearing others speak about their own fat bodies, too, helped my mindset shift. If others—who I loved and respected—could see value in *their* fat bodies, then perhaps there was

similar value in my own. I saw this value in my grandmother, whose body, personality, and jewelry were all larger-than-life in equal measure. I recall her pulling me to the side before weddings and homecoming dances, reminding me that “us bigger girls” got to wear bigger jewels to make us shine. Seeing the way her earrings glistened, spreading light along her many chins, or watching her bracelets get lost in the soft folds of her wrists, reminded me that her body—like my body—was magical.

Beyond mere visual value, learning from other fat people has shown me that fat bodies can be so much more than I ever dared to imagine as a child—sources of comfort, connection, power, protection, and strength. Angelina Moles, for example, recounts:

I have to remind myself that my fatness has cushioned my butt from hard falls while roller skating. My stomach has provided warmth for animals to lay on, for people to cuddle with, for my hands to be warmed. . . . I can give into all the messages of fat hate and anti-fat stigmas that make me feel worthless, and trust me that sometimes I do because it’s hard not to. Other times I think about all of the things this fat body has experienced and give thanks to all this blubber that has protected me. . . . I’m turning towards feeling the liveliness of this body. Glorifying it if you will.⁵

In trying to approach ourselves with a mindset of body reflexivity, we give ourselves the room to navigate myriad attitudes towards our bodies, recognizing that they have value regardless of how we feel about them (203). Even when my muscles fail to have the strength I need to make it through my work day, or on days when I am practically glued to my heating pad in hopes of calming waves of overwhelming, chronic pain, my body is still my own. As such, it has value.

My query to Manne, and my ongoing struggle as a very fat person committed to fat liberation, is how to balance our varied, complicated relationships with our own bodies (and a desire to avoid toxic positivity) with what I see as a real need to shift our collective understanding of the value of fatness. Through highlighting the lived experience of many in fat communities who long for room to celebrate their fatness rather than being ashamed of it, I suspect that we will be more easily and fully able to take on board a mindset of body reflexivity. In a world where fat people are routinely taught that they should hate—and, ideally, eradicate—their fat bodies, highlighting the boundless values of fatness is a lifeline that has helped provide solace to so many fat people (myself included). Centering this value is what has made me see my body as my own. While this “home,” so to speak, may be imperfect and pain-ridden and often frustrating, it is also mine, and through that alone it is valuable.

Body positivity is often both riddled with toxic positivity, and (at least in its modern state, which has strayed far from its fat-activist roots) rife with ethical concerns.⁶ In contrast, body reflexivity seems like a promising relationship to have

towards one's own body, especially insofar as it is more compatible with fat pride than some alternatives (e.g., body neutrality) (204).

As we advance this politics of autonomy, though, we have good reason to keep in mind our rhetorical strategies for advancing this ethos. Starting from a place of highlighting the positive value of fatness can help in this mission, serving as both a lifeline for fat people in dire need of a light in the darkness of an anti-fat world, and as a reminder to all of us that we can think of fatness in a way that radically differs from what so many of us were taught.

6. A COMPLICATED CONVERSATION

This is not to say we can or should only talk about the benefits of fatness. Part of fat liberation, and of body reflexivity, is that we center autonomy by leaving room for a variety of relationships one might have to their own body. Aside from the fact that asking us to see the positive value in fat bodies runs the risk of further alienating those of us at the furthest end of the fat spectrum,⁷ we still have work to do in addressing the harms of anti-fatness. Moreover, as Manne notes, we have good reason to resist any kind of toxic positivity (202–203).

To complicate the picture further, for many fat people their bodies are not a source of positivity whatsoever. Val (@val_and.co), a fat, neurodivergent, disabled content creator who founded the #StyleSeated movement, shares such reflections given her chronic illnesses. As she once implored of her audience,

What if, instead of being a source of strength and vitality, your body feels like a constant battleground—a place of pain and struggle? What if every step is a reminder of limitations, every breath a challenge? The reality is, I don't love my body. I tolerate it. And that's not a failure. It's not a weakness. It's an acknowledgement of my truth—a truth that doesn't make me any less worthy of love, respect, or acceptance. . . . But here's the thing: You don't have to love your body. Your body doesn't have to be beautiful by anyone's standards, including your own. It doesn't have to be a source of pride. It doesn't have to be anything more than what it is—a vessel that carries you through this world, even if imperfectly.⁸

Even with these complications in mind, I still see a responsibility for all of us to think carefully of how (and whether) we center the values of fatness in our conversations about fat people. Walking away from *Unshrinking*, I continue to grapple with the complicated realities of living in this fat body, in this fat-hating society. While I take seriously the worries spurred by things like body positivity, and recognize that there are many people who cannot or do not find positivity in their (fat) bodies, I also see fat bodies as a source of rich, under-appreciated value. What I hope to make room for is an ongoing reflection regarding what could happen if more philosophical work took this as the starting ground—focusing on not just saying that fat isn't bad, but in showing that fat is good.

A big part of how people think about fat bodies is, I think, tied to fear.⁹ Fear that fat is a death sentence. Fear that if you are fat, you are worthless. Fear that if you are fat, you are unloved and unlovable. Especially in a society so deeply steeped in anti-fatness, people assume that fat people *must* hate themselves, and when they become fat, they often loathe it. By showing these more positive sides to being fat, I wonder whether these fears would be at all dissuaded—whether people could see that there is still value in being fat. By highlighting this value, from the onset of our conversations about fatness, it is my hope that we can learn to see that life as a fat person can be full of pleasure, excitement, curiosity, and adventure. If we truly hope to remake the world to properly fit fat bodies, as Manne calls us to do, then perhaps we can begin by re-examining how we approach conversations about and with fat people in the future.

NOTES

1. Cooper, *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*, 33.
2. @lizzobeeating, "if ur not a millennial or gen z it's okay," Instagram Reel, posted September 4, 2024. Accessed September 6, 2024.
3. For example, in Aubrey Gordon's vital project, *What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat*, she tellingly has a chapter entitled "What Thinness Takes," but there is no comparable chapter on "What Fatness Gives."
4. Eaton, "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression," 53.
5. Angelina Moles, "Think about How Much Your Fatness Has Done for You," Social Media, *Instagram* (blog), June 16, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CQMRzG_A8pm/.
6. For a fuller discussion of these worries, see Frazier and Mehdi, "Forgetting Fatness."
7. Frazier, "Imperfection as a Vehicle for Fat Visibility in Popular Media," 292.
8. Instagram, August 12, 2024.
9. This is, of course, an oversimplification of the complex system of oppression that is fatphobia. As Manne aims to dispel through *Unshrinking*, fatphobia is not literally and only a matter of fearing fatness or fat people (11). While fatphobia is not merely a matter our individual attitudes about fat people and is instead a structural phenomenon, it is reasonable to think that addressing our individual attitudes will help move us closer to dismantling fatphobia when done in conjunction with other systemic reforms.

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What I Love about Unshrinking, Why Unshrinking Makes Me Sad, and Six Things I'd Like to Talk about with Kate Manne

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I love Kate Manne's *Unshrinking*. It's a great book about an important topic; I'm very happy she wrote it. The book's central thesis is that contrary to what many of us think, we don't have a problem with there being too many fat people. Instead, we have a major social issue, which is fatphobia. Many of the problems thought to be caused by widespread fatness are, in fact, caused by widespread fatphobia, argues Manne. Connecting fatphobia to its roots in classism, racism, and misogyny, Manne systematically tears apart the myths around larger bodies. I love Manne's thorough and exacting work. It's pretty much exactly the book I would hand someone if I thought I needed to correct their views about size and health. I confess to feeling a little bit professionally jealous. I wish I'd written this book! But I didn't, and so I'm glad Manne did.

Unshrinking is a work of careful research, precise analysis, and argument, yet it's also Manne's personal story. The two aspects of the book blend very well. Manne is a terrific writer, and I applaud her for including her story. She writes, "Where did I learn to hate my fat body?" and talks about her own experiences with fad diets and near-starvation weight loss techniques. The book's impact on me cannot be overstated. Months after reading *Unshrinking*, I still find myself haunted by Manne's personal experiences with fatphobia and her account of her extreme dieting. Her opening story, in which she confesses to feeling "too fat to be feminist in public," left me speechless. Manne writes that she "flinched from the prospect" of doing the usual book tour appearances because of her size. She notes that she didn't do book tours because she was scared of what people would think about her appearance because of her weight. How could such a bright, accomplished woman care so much about what other people think about her looks? I know I might be the outlier here, not Manne, but I do find myself thinking that once you've got a PhD from MIT and a job at Cornell and some pretty amazing books, does it really matter what others think of your size? The tone in the personal sections is pretty sad, and I guess I wanted, for Manne—given the strength of her arguments against fatphobia—a little less sadness and a little more anger at living in such a fatphobic world.

Fatphobia is, on Manne's account, more than just an individual fear of fatness; it's also a form of oppression. Fatphobia is a social system that ranks bodies according to thinness and rewards people in a myriad of ways depending on how closely they conform to the ideal. Fat people are assumed not just to be unhealthy but are also judged negatively in terms of health, moral, sexual, and intellectual status. Piece by piece, Manne carefully unpins the foundations of fatphobia. First, she takes on the

association of fatness and ill health. Second, even if there were some connections between ill health and weight, it's not clear that weight loss is possible. If a drug had the same success/failure rate as weight loss diets, it's not at all obvious that doctors would even prescribe it given the near certainty of regaining the weight, the health risks of yo-yo dieting, and the risk of ending up at an even larger size. Third, even if weight loss were possible and there were health risks associated with remaining overweight, people still wouldn't be obligated to lose weight. There's no imperative to eat less or eat differently, to weigh less. Those choices are up to the individual whose body it is. We can take risks with our health in other areas of our lives, so why not here, too?

With dieting, most people can lose a moderate amount of weight initially. Still, the weight comes back almost inevitably, and after five years have passed, between one- and two-thirds of people will end up heavier than when they started. The health effects of going up and down in weight are significant. Independent of your weight, it's not good for your health to repeatedly go up and down in weight. Weight cycling harms our health in many ways, including cardiovascular health, immune function, metabolic function (including the risk of Type 2 diabetes), and mental health. Manne doesn't deny that there is a correlation between being very heavy and not being as healthy in specific ways. However, that is often just as explainable by structural discrimination that leads to people receiving inadequate health care, compounded by the stress of fat stigma and weight cycling.

Another important theme in the book is Manne's reflections on race and the link between racism and fatphobia. Fatphobia is a relatively recent form of prejudice, writes Manne. It's not always been true that fat bodies were seen as unattractive. In the past, fatness was associated with wealth and luxury. Fat women were considered beautiful. Manne cites work by the sociologist Sabrina Strings, who argues that in the mid-eighteenth century, anti-fatness was born out of a need to differentiate white bodies in France and Britain from the Black bodies who were being so brutally enslaved. It's not that fatness was first derogated, and then Black bodies were associated with fatness. It went the other way. Fat bodies and Black bodies were associated, and that was used to impugn fat bodies—and fat Black bodies specifically—shortly after that. That history is important to grapple with, both to see how contingent and historically recent fatphobia in its systemic form is and also to know that it is a powerful tool of anti-Black racism even today.

It's challenging to write a commentary on a book that does—aside from the sad bits—make me want to cheer on the author and yell "Yes!" at pretty much all the essential points. So, I'm approaching this commentary from the perspective of things I'd like to hear more about. There are also places where my view differs slightly from Manne's. If given the chance, there are six points from the book that I would love to discuss with Manne in an extended conversation.

1. MORAL CHOICE AND FAT SHAME

Manne writes that fatness is often framed as a moral issue and that people should feel guilty or ashamed for being fat. The book sets out the view that there's just nothing morally wrong with being a fat person, and part of that is because fatness is mostly unchosen. We all know the maxim that "ought implies can." Insofar as we have little control over our body's size and shape, it just can't be the case that we are morally required to lose weight and should feel shame if we fail. Manne writes that upwards of 70 percent of the human population's variation in body mass is due to genetics, which makes it a little less heritable than height. Yet, it would be clearly ludicrous to think we're morally obligated to be taller.

So, according to Manne, it's obvious that it's not immoral to fail to do something that's practically impossible in the long term for the vast majority of people or could only be done through unreasonable measures, such as taking medication or undergoing bariatric surgery. I'm interested in the connection between bodily shame (regarding our unruly, out-of-control bodies) and moral shame (for the desire for food and the appetite to enjoy meals with other people and experience the pleasure of delicious food).

2. SIZE AND SHAME

I want to say a few things about Manne's own narrative about size and shame. On the one hand, as a smaller fat person and one from a privileged and educated background, I'm not sure how representative her story is of fat women in the United States. One might think, and sometimes I get the sense that Manne does, that if she feels this bad about her weight, just imagine how much worse it must be for larger girls and women. But in the past, I've wondered if that's true.

I think it might be more challenging to live in a fatphobic society if you're a person who is within striking range of society's ideals of thinness. In a blog post called [The Unexpected Advantages of Growing Up Chubby](#), I speculated that being fat as an adult was less personally challenging to cope with if you were also a chubby kid. You had learned how to handle other people's reactions and not to care too much about having a slender physique. I suspect that some of the closer-to-the-ideal-weight women suffer more because they have been inside the beauty norms for so long that it hurts to feel out.

I also think the experience of being fat is different for those of us who identify as queer and who move in a sex-positive and body-positive queer community.

3. BODY POSITIVITY

Manne rejects both body positivity and body neutrality as unrealistic and instead endorses a position she calls "body reflexivity." What is body reflexivity? It's the idea that my body is for me, and your body is for you. Manne wants to give up on the idea that our bodies exist to serve others. Instead, we should regard our bodies as our homes, something which we should completely control. Manne writes that this ethos is connected with a radical politics of autonomy that would vindicate the right to be queer, to be trans, to be fat, to be old, to be disabled, and so on.

I want to say a few things to defend body positivity. I don't think of body positivity as an individual's obligation to their own body. I don't feel or experience "love your body" as an imperative, as one more thing that good feminists must do. It's not for me one more way to fail as a feminist. Instead, I've always heard "love your body" as a permission. Body positivity opens up space to love and feel regard for non-normative bodies. For me, it's mostly about making spaces, not telling women what they must think and feel. We can understand body positivity too individually and miss out on the critical social and community aspects of body positivity. Melissa Gibson, in [Body Positivity: Creating a Space for the Representation of Marginalized Bodies](#), says that people often think that body positivity is about loving your own body and thinking all bodies are beautiful, but the roots of the idea are far more radical. It's about making room for all bodies outside the mainstream. That includes considerations of size but also age, ability, and race. As Gibson says, it's not just about young, white, smaller, fat women on Instagram feeling positive about their belly rolls.

But Manne is clear that she's positive about the existence of fat bodies even though she doesn't endorse body positivity about one's own body. On page 189, she writes that fat bodies are part of human bodily diversity. "I believe not only that fat people should be respected and treated with dignity, and given access to adequate healthcare, and so on. I believe that our fatness contributes something to the world that is worth having. We add something to the world with our size and shape and sheer existence."

4. PARENTING IN A FATPHOBIC WORLD

Children are on the front lines of the so-called war on obesity, and if there is one thing our fatphobic world hates more than fat adults it's fat children. There is incredible pressure on parents to raise thin children and to model healthy attitudes towards eating and towards our bodies. Parents are judged based on their children's sizes, and fat parents are judged even more harshly if they have fat children.

If we do have children, and our children turn out to be fat like us—quite likely, given the power of genetics to determine body weight—we will face widespread disapproval. The assumption will be that we eat and feed our children unhealthy food, and that the bullying they face is thus a product of our own poor choices. Even thin parents of fat children will be blamed and shamed for their children's bodies, according to recent research. (32)

My worry about the approaches to feeding children that set out to combat fatphobia is that they overestimate how much effect parents and families can have. It's not that we oughtn't to try to raise children with body confidence who honor their own appetites, hunger, and food choices; rather, it's that doing so in this culture may have little or no effect. Peer groups and the social environment of schools may have more influence than families and so the answers we seek out need to be social and political, not just parental. Otherwise, we risk making the same mistake of blaming parents when parents have little control.

5. THE AUTHORITY OF HUNGER

Manne writes that in a fatphobic society we come to view hunger itself as the enemy. Manne challenges the idea that we should learn to live with chronic hunger (189). Diets leave us perpetually hungry, writes Manne, and we deserve to be free from this. In the chapter called “The Authority of Hunger,” Manne talks about her own suffering while dieting and the days in which she wound up eating nothing. She could go four or five days without eating and living with the pain of hunger, unable to sleep because of hunger pangs. In one such episode of self-starvation, Manne finally ate after going seven days without food, and she realized that she couldn’t afford to ignore her own hunger.

Manne characterizes hunger as a bodily imperative which constitutes a moral imperative. Her discussion of the ethical obligations that follow from bodily imperatives is fascinating, and I found myself, as a fellow moral theorist, wanting to hear more about this. But my own experiences of hunger and the ways in which it waxes and wanes in response to a variety of hormonal factors have led me to wonder about how reliable an indicator of the need to eat hunger actually is. I actually think the unreliability of hunger is the weak link in intuitive eating as an approach to feeding oneself. Many of us don’t feel hungry when we need to eat, and others experience hunger almost all of the time. Given the range of hormones that affect hunger, we may need to interpret hunger as evidence but not, by itself, the whole story.

6. MOVING OUR BODIES AND WHY THAT’S ALMOST NEVER OKAY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN IN A FATPHOBIC WORLD

Manne writes that exercise has relatively little to do with weight loss, but it does have a lot to do with our health (42–43). Given the evidence of the effectiveness of dieting, it’s a plan a doctor ought almost never to recommend, but the opposite is true of exercise. Writes Manne, “When it comes to our health, there is considerable evidence that it is fitness, not fatness, that matters most, and that fitness mitigates many if not all of the health risks associated with living in a larger body. And yet many continue to mistake fatness for the biggest problem.” (49)

But weight stigma and fatphobia result in fat people avoiding exercise. If you are going to be harassed or belittled at the gym (or, speaking from experience here, get yelled at from passing cars while on your bike, “get off the road, you fat bitch”) you are less likely to get enough movement in your life. Tracy Isaacs and I noted, when doing research on our feminism and fitness blog, how regularly women were running at night, or even **on treadmills in backyard sheds**, because they were too ashamed of their bodies and didn’t want to be seen exercising. Moving less does affect your health, but it’s not fatness, it’s fatphobia, that’s the cause of moving less. I would also add that myths about movement and fatness also result in larger people moving less. If you exercise in order to lose weight and then don’t lose weight (because exercise rarely leads to weight loss), you’re likely to give up and lose out on the myriad health benefits of exercise.

Likewise, some of these same myths hurt thin people too. Many people choose not to exercise because they think they are at the right weight, and weight loss is the main reason for engaging in deliberate, sustained movement. Fat people, scared away by fatphobia from the gym, sports, and other kinds of movement such as running and swimming, hiking, biking, skiing, and dancing, miss out on the mental health benefits of exercise and from the sheer joy and pleasure that comes from moving our bodies. Also, involvement in sports and athletic achievement are some of the few things that have been shown to positively affect our self-image. If fatphobic attitudes stop larger women and girls from getting involved in sports, the problems caused by fatphobia just get worse.

7. CONCLUSION

Some final thoughts about *Unshrinking*: I will eagerly share it with people who I think are in the throes of a fatphobic worldview. I also hope those who read it don’t stop there. What else would I recommend? Aubrey Gordon’s *What We Don’t Talk about When We Talk about Fat* and Sabrina Strings’s *Fearing the Black Body: The Racist Origins of Fat Phobia* come immediately to mind. I recommend that readers listen to the Maintenance Phase podcast and read Virginia Sole-Smith’s substack, *Burnt Toast*. On parenting, we should all read Sole-Smith’s *Fat Talk: Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture*. Interestingly, all of these works are on Manne’s list of references. I would love to teach a graduate seminar with *Unshrinking* and all of these connected readings. It’s a philosophically rich area, and I want to thank Kate Manne for moving fatphobia into the center of concern in contemporary ethics.

Author’s Reply to Commentaries

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Let me begin by thanking my six commentators for their generosity and engagement. I am also indebted to Barrett Emerick and Ami Harbin for their kind invitation and organizational labor. It’s an honor and a pleasure to get to contribute as a respondent to this special issue on *Unshrinking*.

I won’t be able to do justice to all of the insightful comments my commentators have offered. Instead, I will try to home in on an issue raised by each of them that I currently feel able to respond to—albeit often in a tentative or “yes, and” spirit. It’s a mark of the remarkably constructive nature of their engagement that there is no need for the sort of defensive rebuttals that some such exchanges in philosophy may necessitate.

In Céline Leboeuf’s contribution, she nicely reconstructs my idea of body reflexivity partly as advocating that we suspend *judgment* about our bodies rather than appraising them positively or neutrally—as a correction, of course, to the negativity often leveled at us due to fatphobia in particular or beauty culture generally. This captures the negative piece of the idea of body reflexivity, which I introduce in

the book's conclusion by pointing to the possibility of not assessing our bodies positively, neutrally, or negatively, but rather throwing out the scales of judgment altogether.

I developed this idea for a number of reasons, which Leboeuf is keenly attuned to. For one, there is something both frequently unrealistic and potentially draconian about pushing people to be uniformly positive about a much-maligned and vulnerable subject, in the form of their own physicality. (I should clarify that, if some people do manage it, I certainly wouldn't be critical; but body positivity is the idea that we *ought* to be positive about our own bodies and that of others, not just the idea that we are entitled or permitted to be, at least on my construal.) There's also at least a tension between such positivity and the fact that, for some people, changing their bodies, even in radical ways, is *not* an expression of the kind of conformism and kowtowing to pernicious social standards that I worry about in *Unshrinking*. Rather, as in the case of trans folks, it may be a way of reclaiming their body and becoming more fully themselves. Body positivity is to some extent an awkward fit with recognizing the validity and importance of bodily transformation for some people.

But Leboeuf (and Samantha Brennan too) is quite right that there's been good work that goes under the broad heading of body positivity. Body positivity is both the simple idea above and a popular hashtag: it would be surprising if the latter did not encompass more than the former, particularly because the hashtag is sometimes (I think mistakenly) used as a synonym for what I would prefer to call "body liberation."¹ I am also sympathetic to the proposal, made by Nichole Wood-Barcalow, Jessica Alleva, and Tracy Tylka, that body positivity can be separated out from a positive body image—which includes body appreciation, care, and love. Leboeuf's commentary raises an excellent further question: What is the relationship between a good body image in this sense and body reflexivity?

I've mentioned the negative piece of body reflexivity, but there is a positive piece as well: the claim that, instead of judging your body in any way whatsoever (even assessing its value as neutral), you should change the way you think about it, in terms of its teleology. I offer, in this vein, the following little mantra: my body is for me; your body is for you. And so on, and so forth, for everyone in the world—and plausibly, we might add, every non-human animal.

One possible way of further cashing out this idea is in terms of Marilyn Frye's notion of "the loving eye."² I was intrigued by Leboeuf's suggestion here partly because I think *rejecting* the idea of what Frye calls "the arrogant eye," in contrast, is exactly what I was trying to get at in my book's conclusion. She writes, as Leboeuf says, that for the arrogant perceiver, everything in the world is either "for me" or "against me." This makes women look like consumable sex objects—or, else, defective rejects—and non-human animals look like meat. It makes a tight bolt appear "stubborn" and a woman who makes the wrong dinner—or none at all—appear insubordinate to her husband even at the level of visual perception.

And it is the eye I am implicitly talking about when I open the conclusion by discussing Jordan B. Peterson's obnoxious remarks that the plus-size model, Yumi Nu, is "not beautiful." "Sorry," he says, and of course he's not sorry. His remarks suggest something meant for him, made for him, indeed offered to him personally. When her image is not pleasing to him, due to her fatness, he rejects it in the high-handed manner of someone who's been given a gift that's insultingly out of touch with his taste, his powers of discernment.

Such bodily dissection and discernment, and the arrogant eye that feeds into it, is what my husband is implicitly rejecting when he says that he doesn't look at me with "a critical eye." I am glad Leboeuf picked up on this parenthetical. This was usually something my husband said, I should add, when I used to ask him whether he'd noticed that I'd gained (or, occasionally, lost) a minor amount of weight. He would say, I think truthfully, that he hadn't, because he wasn't looking at me appraisingly. He wasn't "sizing me up." He would add (bless him) that he just saw the person he loved, his partner, or some variant.

And truly, I get it. I feel the same way about him. I feel the same way about my family members and friends and, hopefully, people generally. And I think that *many* people look that way at others, particularly young children. That is, until children reach a certain, critical age, we tend not to look at their bodies in an appraising, judgmental way. (Unless they are deemed *too fat*, which is a distressing possible judgment leveled even at some infants, which Virginia Sole-Smith has brilliantly analyzed.)³ But with young children, much of the time, we just see them as themselves, and view them in a way that is appreciative without being appraising. We see their bodies as for themselves, to enjoy and learn and run around in. (As the latter idea highlights, I don't mean to suggest that there are no problems whatsoever here—on the contrary, there *are* worries about ableism and healthism to mull over in particular.) I think this attitude is also common when it comes to the non-human animals we keep as pets: dogs, for example. There's a reason why "We Rate Dogs" is a parody account on X (formerly Twitter), with every delightful creature garnering more than a 10/10. The idea of rating dogs is just too ridiculous.

One might even say that there's only one group of people who reliably garners aesthetic judgment about their bodies, as they come of age: girls and women (as well as, plausibly, other gender-marginalized people). This points to the fact that such appraisals are far from compulsory. And that the internalized male gaze which we often speak of is really the internalized "arrogant eye" of Marilyn Frye's famous theorization.

But is the antidote to the internalized arrogant eye to develop a *loving* eye, specifically, and train it on our own bodies? I don't doubt that this is a useful resource, but I don't think it is an all-encompassing solution either.⁴ In part this is because, as Leboeuf points out earlier in her commentary, attitudes other than love, including not only care and compassion, but also negative emotions like frustration, may be appropriately trained on our own bodies inasmuch as they can betray us. And it is also because I

think the antidote to the internalized arrogant eye may be partly a matter of *not looking* or, perhaps, *no longer needing to look* at our bodies much whatsoever. Leboeuf herself suggests, in other places, the idea of focusing more on what we feel or sense; the suggestion to think about what our bodies can do is also common (and, again, potentially problematic from an anti-ableist perspective).⁵ I embrace all of these ideas as important but, again, likely not all-encompassing.

For my own part, body reflexivity has meant that I don't necessarily look at myself that much or focus on bodily sensations that much either. I experience my body, at this moment in my life, primarily as a vehicle for getting around the world and looking at—as well as otherwise taking in—ideas and events and other people. In a certain sense, my experience of my body has become pretty minimal. And this feels like not only a kind of victory, but a balm, a relief, a reprieve. Preserving these possibilities, which have long been the exclusive province of privileged boys and men, strikes me as one thing body reflexivity can do for us: along with helping us to cultivate the healthy, interesting, and sustaining relationships with our bodies that are almost as diverse as the bodies themselves, on my reckoning.

One question I've often been asked, in the course of researching and presenting my work on fatphobia, is the relationship between fatness and disability. This question has taken salutary forms—philosophers sympathetic to the social model of disability wondering whether fatness can perhaps be understood in the same way—and also terrible ones—a radio host who said the quiet part out loud and wondered whether we could possibly accept the “severely obese” bodies who encounter mobility challenges. “Think about the people who use mobility scooters because they're so large they can't even get to the shops anymore,” she said, smugly wringing her hands. “I'm not fatphobic, but surely you must admit there's a problem there” before going on to tout the glory of semaglutide. (I discontinued the interview; I wasn't going to contribute to such a doubly stigmatizing discourse.)

I will admit that my worries about feeding into such stereotypes have limited the ways I've drawn on the philosophy of disability in *Unshrinking*, a work of public philosophy. This is to record a quandary I still don't know quite what to do about: even if construing fatness as closely related to disability *correctly and sensitively conceived* would be illuminating, even essential, construing fatness as closely related to disability *conceived as insensitively and crudely as is typical* is clearly a disaster, a recipe for fatphobia—and yet more ableism. And my worry is that, in even attempting the former, I would be misunderstood due to careless misreadings along the lines of the latter. If you look at some of the least charitable and auspicious reviews of my book, you can find the disgust leveled at very large bodies tied ineluctably to the suspicion that some bodies are just too large to *not* be disabled—and that those who *are* disabled are somehow invalid in needing what they need, such as assistive technology. (Think of the condescending pity viewers of the dreadful film *The Whale* are invited

to feel for Charlie in needing a bar to pull himself up in bed and a walking frame and wheelchair. Fatphobia here draws on ableism in order to rationalize itself and excuse its jejune cruelty.⁶)

What *is* accurate and important is Clarisse Paron's observation (echoed by Alison Reiheld) that some bodies' largeness is indeed disabling in a society whose material structures are built exclusively for smaller folks: everything from health-care resources to airplane seats to dining chairs.⁷ Whether or not this means that fatness can therefore *be* a disability will depend, of course, on how you define disability. On a social model of disability, as Elizabeth Barnes defines it, “disability is the disadvantage produced by social prejudice against certain types of persons (persons with impairments). Were society not organized in a way that penalizes people with impairments, there would be no disabled people. Disability just is the negative net effects of having an impairment in a society that discriminates against those with impairments.”⁸ I am persuaded by Barnes's argument, however, that this pushes the bump in the rug to what an *impairment* is, exactly, and is also implausibly committed to the idea that *all* impairments would be trivial in a non-ableist society. Given this stance, I don't need to get into the question of whether fatness of certain kinds should even be counted as an impairment (something which, for the record, I am not that comfortable in saying).

I am sympathetic to Barnes's own alternative social *constructionist* model of disability, according to which a person, *S*, is physically disabled in a context, *C*, iff:

- (i) *S* is in some bodily state *x*
- (ii) The rules for making judgements about solidarity employed by the disability rights movement classify *x* in context *C* as among the physical conditions that they are seeking to promote justice for.⁹

Unfortunately, however, this now leaves the question of whether fatness is, by itself, sometimes a disability seemingly unanswered: it's at least unclear whether disability rights activism properly extends to people who have trouble navigating the world because and only because it is not made to accommodate the size or weight of their bodies. (That these are *related* and *entangled* struggles should be uncontroversial for all of us. But is it one and the same one?)

So here's where I land: I think it's important to acknowledge that some fat people are disabled (on any definition of disability—because they are blind or paraplegic, say), and some fat people are not. And some fat people will count as disabled due to their very fatness on some humane models of disabilities and not others (or, more accurately, the answer as to whether or not they are disabled may be, at least as far as I can tell, indeterminate). But regardless of this complexity, these only partly overlapping Venn diagrams of populations, I remain sympathetic to Paron's hunger for more intersectionality in *Unshrinking* with respect to disability. Here's what I think I should have said

there: we can acknowledge the distinction between fatness and disability *while holding that fatphobia and ableism are deeply in cahoots* in society as we know it. Indeed, my very hesitation to get deeper there is due to this very fact. But our expectation that bodies should look and function within a certain narrow range—as is convenient from the perspective of late-stage capitalism—is offensive and oppressive. Plausibly, then, resources from the philosophy of disability and disability theory more broadly will be deeply relevant to a fuller treatment of fatphobia and continued research on this subject.

To move from one issue I've not yet gotten to the bottom of to another: the way concerns about health are frequently used as a pretext or cover or excuse for fatphobia. That is, people with no real expertise about a fat person's health status in particular or the complex relationship between weight and health in general will say things like "I'm just worried about your health!" as a way to justify their advice that a fat person lose weight through diet and exercise (or, now, take Ozempic). This despite the fact that weight regain is then the rule, not the exception (including in the 80 percent of cases when people *stop* taking Ozempic due to its side effects), and that the health ill effects of weight cycling are very well documented.¹⁰

Of course, the weaponization of health discourse against fat people is well recognized within fat activist circles (notwithstanding Reiheld's fair criticism that I could have said more about this in *Unshrinking*). What is less well studied, and deserves more philosophical attention, is how to analyze these phenomena using the tools of contemporary philosophy of language.

One suggestion I made in *Unshrinking* is that the very word "health" and its cognates (e.g., "healthy") may, in some contexts, function as something like covert dogwhistles for fatphobic sentiments.¹¹ For example, in Chapter 2, I ask the reader to imagine a fatphobic relative saying, "I just saw Cam, who doesn't look very *healthy* nowadays," about your childhood friend, who you haven't seen in over a decade. In many Anglo-American contexts, you'd naturally assume that your friend Cam has gained weight and that your relative disapproves of that. (Interestingly, according to my informants, in some non-Western contexts with a more recent history of food scarcity, this relative might be heard to imply that Cam is now so thin as to look sickly to their eye.)

I also consider in this connection the ways that talk of "healthy" food is often tantamount to food that is assumed to be conducive to weight loss. This in service of the point that, although I felt the need to include a chapter on the (again, complex) relationship between weight and health in *Unshrinking*, I did so with a sense of real trepidation: we need to talk about health, to be sure. But we also need to recognize the way the *discourse* about health is often turned like a knife against fat folks.

In Vanessa Voss's commentary, she proposes the complementary idea of fatphobia often being masked

by figleaves. The basic idea here, which again draws on work in the philosophy of language by Jennifer Saul, is that people often make fatphobic statements which pass as acceptable by being cloaked in supposed health concerns. "I'm not fatphobic, but fat people do need to take care of themselves and get healthy" and "I would never fat shame anyone, but I'm worried about your health" are representative examples of such fatphobic figleaves.

I think this is an excellent suggestion, but I do want to raise a question about fatphobic dogwhistles and figleaves both. A premise of much of the work on these tools of manipulation in the literature is that anti-racist norms are accepted by a considerable proportion of the population—hence the utility of what Saul calls *covert effect racist dogwhistles*, which act on some such people without their awareness, and *racial figleaves*, which provide cover for utterances which would otherwise be conspicuously racist and thus unacceptable. The thing about fatphobia, though, is that it remains a very prevalent form of prejudice, even in liberal and progressive circles. (Note this is distinct from the common and, frankly, ridiculous idea that fatphobia is "the last acceptable form of prejudice." If only!) As I write in the introduction, it is the only form of implicit bias studied by Harvard researchers that is known to be on the rise, as well as the form of explicit bias that is decreasing the most slowly.¹²

So I have the hunch that the preponderance of fatphobic dogwhistles and figleaves may have more to do with self-image and moral defensiveness than these are necessary tools for spreading the gospel of weight loss. That is, the utility of these moves may have more to do with the speaker than they have to do with the audience. I leave this for other philosophers, better-versed in the subtleties and technicalities of the relevant literature, to explore. Whatever the case, I am completely in agreement with Voss's overall case that fatphobia is a threat to good reasoning and philosophical acuity much more than fatness is. As I remark, their fatphobia sees philosophers like Peter Singer and Daniel Callahan making arguments that are not only cruel; they are also not very clever. Meanwhile, fat people have some of the deepest insights to offer about the vagaries and vulnerabilities of human embodiment—a central philosophical concern, at least in my book.

I want to close by talking about my own positionality in response to the commentaries by Samantha Brennan, Alison Reiheld, and Cheryl Frazier—who raise many important distinct concerns and excellent further questions, to be clear, but also one that I think I see a common thread in. Namely, who am I to talk about fatness now? Despite all of their generosity and care in approaching this question, it is one I feel acutely given my current level of fatness.

As Reiheld notes, I talk about myself when I talk about fat people: I use the first-person plural—"we," "us," "our." I do this because I have been fat virtually my whole adult life, and I identify strongly as a fat person to this day. But I am now, somewhat awkwardly, in one of my smaller incarnations.

Shortly before I began the writing project that would eventually become *Unshrinking*, I went through a difficult period where I would stop eating for days at a time. It was during the first year of the pandemic, when my attempts at a low-carb diet had almost no effect on the scales. I was desperate to lose weight. And so I just stopped eating.

It was a terrible idea and an even worse time. I won't rehash it here because the details are not that important; they are anyway all in the book and I am always cognizant of the risk, in speaking of this, that I inadvertently have the opposite influence than the cautionary one I intend. I opened up about it in the last chapter of *Unshrinking* partly because the awareness that larger people may suffer from disordered eating, or even full-blown restrictive eating disorders, is still all too rare. A person with atypical anorexia—which involves all the same symptoms as so-called typical anorexia but being underweight—will typically receive no help or support for over a decade after seeking treatment.¹³

When I began to work on *Unshrinking*, I fully expected to regain the weight. But it never really happened: or, rather, it hasn't happened yet, since I do still expect it to. Bodies are weird and mercurial and wildly unpredictable. Mine is now a somewhat awkward fit for public fat activism. Some people have written me, angrily, saying I'm not fat enough to represent them properly. Others have looked me up and down at book events and declared me not fat at all, in a surprised or disappointed or seemingly neutral spirit. These reactions (and others Reiheld documents) are all fair, and I don't know quite what to do about them. I am certainly *historically* fat, which matters here, and I wonder what level of fatness would be required to represent all fat people—given that size diversity within fatness is, as Frazier points out, vital to acknowledge. Trying to represent all fat people thus seems, just as she argues, deeply misguided.

For most of my life, I have been a "small fat" person, who requires plus sizes but who doesn't struggle to fit into most of the spaces designated for bodies in society—airplane seats have felt tight but I've never needed a seatbelt extender. (Whereas mid fat, large fat, and infinifat people face more barriers in these regards, in more or less direct proportion to their size, given the inaccessible and fatphobic built environment as we know it.¹⁴) Arguably, this has made my life as a fat person easier in most ways but harder in one; coming somewhat close to some beauty ideals for some periods in my life made them frustratingly elusive, rather than too far out of reach to even try to meet, as Brennan astutely suggests. Whatever the case, my story of struggling to fit into academia, which Brennan reacted to as sad, is not meant to be a sob story so much as to highlight a predicament I had the privilege to highlight at this point in my life. (Although I fully acknowledge the validity of Brennan's reaction and, for my own part, found it interesting to realize that the sadness of my tone hadn't even dawned on me; I was aiming to elicit something like anger or indignation.)

Philosophy is a discipline where so many bodies—especially fat, Black, brown, trans, non-binary, and disabled bodies—are excluded that those of us who get past the gatekeeping have an obligation to protest the barriers and try to break

them off their hinges. That was my intention in "Small Wonder," the chapter that tries to show how prejudiced we are against the irrepressible flesh, against fatness, and against anything feminized, in philosophy. I close with the observation that fat people are amongst the smartest and wisest about the way that our bodies are unruly and uncontrollable—wild, even. I hope that complements my closing suggestion that bodily diversity in size as well as skin tone and disabilities and gender expression is not merely tolerable; it is actively valuable and worth proudly celebrating.

But Frazier is right that there's something lamentably defensive about *Unshrinking* for much of its length. I was particularly ambivalent about the chapter effectively defending fat people against the charge that we are necessarily unhealthy. I do think that I needed to include this discussion, and the (complex and surprising) data about this, given where we are as a culture in the discourse around fatness. But that doesn't mean that this framing doesn't come with real costs and even harms that Frazier is, in my view, quite right about.

I love Frazier's idea of a more radical and liberating premise: not just what fatness *doesn't* cost and what the pursuit of thinness takes (to adapt a line from Aubrey Gordon), but rather exploring what fatness *gives* that remains unsaid and perhaps unsayable. Certainly, as someone who has been quite fat and is now much less fat (borderline fat?), I find there is much to miss: my former lushness, my softness, my strength, and perhaps above all, my hitherto power to surprise people that my fat body housed an analytically sharp mind (well, on a good day, anyway).

What Fatness Gives is in many ways a more exciting and potentially liberating project than *Unshrinking*—whose slightly defensive, reactive character is betrayed even by its title (my book is not, after all, called *Expanding* or similar). I am not sure we are ready for it, culturally, but I hope that we get there. I hope Frazier writes it. I will be an early and avid reader.

I thank all of my commentators, from the bottom of my heart, for their contributions, which I have learned so much from. I wrote *Unshrinking* partly to find community: to build solidarity on the basis of a body that had long felt like a liability. Writing it felt, viscerally, like lifting my head out of shame and meeting the reader's gaze, saying, "It's like this for me, how about you?" Finding intellectual as well as bodily community in doing so has been such a joy, such a privilege—and never more so than on the present occasion.

NOTES

1. My sense is that Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott's nice ideas, the majority of which I'm very sympathetic to, as Leboeuf anticipates, extend well beyond body positivity to a blueprint for body liberation, despite the organization's branding (see, e.g., <https://thebodypositive.org/about-us/>).
2. Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way."
3. Sole-Smith, *Fat Talk*.
4. Note in this connection that "the loving eye" is, for Frye, the opposite (or contrary) of "the arrogant eye," *The Politics of Reality*, 75. I am proposing that what body reflexivity needs and

invites is the *negation* (or contradictory) of “the arrogant eye” instead.

5. See Leboeuf, “Anatomy of the Thigh Gap”; and Kite and Kite, *More Than a Body*, respectively.
6. See my “The Whale’s Point of View,” <https://katemanne.substack.com/p/the-whales-point-of-view>.
7. I mean *constitutively* disabling to fat bodies, but there is a plausible causal claim in the offing too: if you can’t access health care, due to the size of your body, then you may well *become* disabled in another way due to that lack of access.
8. Barnes, *The Minority Body*, 25.
9. Barnes, *The Minority Body*, 45.
10. See Manne, *Unshrinking*, Chapter 2.
11. Note that Saul takes a bifurcated approach to dogwhistles, distinguishing these “covert effect” ones from *overt code* ones such as white supremacists using “88” to mean “Heil Hitler” on the internet. See Saul, *Dogwhistles and Fingleaves*, 9–10.
12. See *Unshrinking*, 9.
13. *Unshrinking*, 179, where I draw on important research by Erin Harrop. As I say there, “atypical” anorexia is actually the more common variant.

14. In differentiating these degrees of fatness—as well as at many other points throughout *Unshrinking*—I draw on important work by Ash Nischuk, creator of *The Fat Lip* blog and podcast: <http://thefatlip.com/>.

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APA STUDIES ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

LORI GALLEGOS, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITOR

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This issue of *APA Studies in Hispanic/Latino Philosophy* proudly features both outstanding scholarship on a major figure in Latin American philosophy, and an annual report by the Society of Mexican American Philosophy—an organization that is playing an important role in this growing field of research.

We begin with the winner of the 2024 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought—an essay titled “Ginés de Sepúlveda: Christian Empire, Virtue, and the Natural Servitude of Indigenous Americans.” In this award-winning essay, author Stefan Terrazas examines Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda’s use of Aristotle’s natural slavery argument to justify the subjection of Indigenous Americans. Terrazas weighs in on the debate about whether Sepúlveda advocates for the actual enslavement of Indigenous Americans or rather their forced subjection as serfs in the medieval sense of the term. The essay argues that providing an effective response requires reassessing some of the formulations found in the *Democrates Secundus* in light of other, related works. Terrazas argues that, for Sepúlveda, the purpose of religious conversion is to habituate Indigenous Americans into morally “civilized” and Christian customs, implying that their alleged inferiority is not inherent by nature.

The essay is followed by an annual report by the Society of Mexican American Philosophy (SMAP). The organization was founded just a decade ago, but, as the report illustrates, it has grown substantially and is energetically facilitating research presentations, professional development, philosophical conversations, and the growth of community.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy is accepting contributions for the fall 2025 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on that topic or on any topic related to Hispanic/Latinx thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as meditaciones, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

ARTICLES

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

BOOK REVIEWS

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

DEADLINES

The deadline for the spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. The deadline for the fall issue is May 1. Authors should expect a decision by June 15. Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor, Lori Gallegos, at LoriGallegos@txstate.edu, Department of Philosophy, Comal Building 102, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666.

FORMATTING GUIDELINES

The APA Studies adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use italics instead of underlining. Use an “em dash” (—) instead of a double hyphen (--). Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90. See Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

ARTICLES

Ginés de Sepúlveda: Christian Empire, Virtue, and the Natural Servitude of Indigenous Americans

Winner, 2024 APA Essay Prize in Latin American Thought

Stefan Terrazas

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INTRODUCTION

This essay examines the political philosophy of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, particularly focusing on the application of the natural slavery argument he borrows from Aristotle and uses to justify the subjection of Indigenous Americans. Sepúlveda espoused what many today would consider belligerent views against Indigenous people, depicting them as inferior beings with “barbarian” and “impious” customs in the Disputation of Valladolid, Spain (1550–1551). This event was of major historical significance, as the Spanish Crown summoned Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de Las Casas (known as the “Protector of the Indians”) to debate the manner through which the conquest of the Americas should be conducted. The purpose was to inform the making of further imperial policies in the “New World” and to determine the appropriate methods for propagating the Christian faith with “security of conscience.”¹ The urgency of the debate stemmed from mounting reports of colonial crimes and unresolved questions on the status and nature of Indigenous Americans *vis-à-vis* Spaniards. Additionally, there was a pressing need to establish clear regulations for *encomiendas*, the colonial labor system through which Indigenous and African people were often enslaved.²

While much attention has been devoted to the debate, particularly focusing on the views and legacy of Las Casas, the position taken by Sepúlveda remains disputed. The disagreement centers on whether Sepúlveda advocates for the *actual* enslavement of Indigenous Americans or, instead, for their forced subjection as serfs. A key aspect to throw light on this interpretive question is re-examining what exactly Sepúlveda meant by “natural” in referring to Indigenous Americans as “natural slaves” or “natural servants,” depending on how we decide to translate the Latin term *natura servi*. Another important consideration is whether Sepúlveda believed Indigenous Americans could ever become equals to Spaniards. This essay argues that providing an effective response to this puzzle requires reassessing some of the formulations of the *Democrates Secundus* (ca. 1544–1545) in light of other related works because it has been often treated in isolation. An examination of the text alongside Sepúlveda’s other political writings indicates that he supports their subjection as serfs to secure their religious conversion by and through the acquisition of moral virtue in Aristotelian terms. Moreover, the moral vices that define “barbarians” are neither fixed in nature nor permanently predisposed by the environment; rather, they can be overcome through

habituation and Christian conversion, the latter being tied to eternal salvation.

The outline of this essay is as follows: First, I will synthesize the controversies around Sepúlveda’s stance on Indigenous Americans. Then, I will dive into the *Democrates Secundus* and show his rejection of chattel slavery, a view that became clearer over the years.³ Lastly, I will look at his notes on moral habituation, conversion, and the environment, all of these being decisive for the question of what Sepúlveda meant by *natura servi*.

1. NATURAL SLAVES OR NATURAL SERVANTS?

Sepúlveda (1490–1573) was a philosopher, possibly the foremost Aristotelian thinker in Spain, who later served the Spanish Crown as chronicler of the Spanish King, Charles V, and tutored Prince Phillip II. He was also very well connected with ecclesiastic and aristocratic elites in Italy.⁴ Most biographical and scholarly references to Sepúlveda were very scarce until the mid-twentieth century when historians and Latinists, particularly Ángel Losada, recovered much of his work. His relative obscurity can be attributed to the negative reactions against his views, which led to the denial of a license to print and distribute the *Democrates Secundus*. In fact, the *Apologia* was first translated from Latin to Spanish in 1780, while the *Democrates Secundus* remained unpublished until 1892.⁵ Only these two sources were available in the early twentieth century, along with Las Casas’s piece entitled *Contained Herein is a Debate or Disputation*, which contains Domingo De Soto’s summary of the great debate.⁶

The analysis of all these works related to the great debate generated controversies among Sepúlveda scholars from the early twentieth century down to the present. The controversy is best illustrated by the discussion between Hanke and Quirk. On the one hand, for Hanke, Sepúlveda applies the Aristotelian doctrine literally when he writes that “inferior Indians may be justly warred against and enslaved if they do not recognize that the Spaniards are their natural superiors.”⁷ This view is offered in response to the objection raised by Quirk, according to whom, rather than advocating for chattel slavery, Sepúlveda means that Indigenous Americans should be subjected as serfs under the medieval institution of serfdom linked to paying tribute.⁸ This institution was integral to Spanish Christian society during the sixteenth century, and Quirk argues that Hanke mistranslates the term *natura servus* as “slaves by nature.”⁹

Notably, the polarized decades-long controversy that Hanke and Quirk were involved in remains unresolved. More recently, Castañeda has made a careful contrast between Aristotle’s *Politics* and the *Democrates Secundus*, arriving at the conclusion that Sepúlveda’s view aligns with Aristotle’s argument of natural slavery.¹⁰ For Castañeda, this is because Sepúlveda believes that the nature of Indigenous Americans could *not* be changed—they could apprehend reason but not produce it—and thus could never become equals to Spaniards even if the former were granted more rights eventually. Conversely, Glanville et al. claim that Sepúlveda uses the idea of natural slavery metaphorically.¹¹ Sepúlveda advocates for Indigenous Americans being

natural servants (*natura servi*) and servants of free-born status (*ministri conditionis liberae*), but not chattels (*servi sei mancipia*). To frame an answer to this puzzle, the next section examines how Sepúlveda employs these terms in the *Democrates Secundus* and how his own views reached greater clarity over the years. I then look at his writings prior to and after the debate, which throw light on what he meant by “natural.”

2. THE DEMOCRATES SECUNDUS AND THE DERADICALIZATION OF A THESIS OF SUBJECTION

The controversies around the *Democrates Secundus* and the notion of natural slavery/servitude are largely due to exegetical and philological difficulties. In fact, Glanville et al. have tracked at least five manuscripts of the *Democrates Secundus*,¹² with most commentators citing what is actually an *intermediate* manuscript written sometime in 1544–1545.¹³ As Sepúlveda recounts, the *Democrates Secundus* was composed upon request of the President of the Royal Council of the Indies who heard that he considered waging war against Indigenous Americans just.¹⁴ The main question that the *Democrates Secundus* (*DS*) poses is if waging war against the “Indians” can be deemed just according to the divine and natural laws, and the law of nations (*ius gentium*). Certainly, the answer hinges on clarifying the nature of Indigenous Americans *vis-à-vis* Spaniards. In this text, Sepúlveda states, “Some are by nature masters, while others are by nature slaves. For those who are powerful through intelligence and wit, but not through strength of the body, are by nature masters.”¹⁵ Although this view is borrowed from Aristotle, what is distinctive is how he applies it to deduce the inferiority of Indigenous Americans. This intermediate manuscript of the *Democrates Secundus*—the most belligerent one—depicts their alleged inferior nature in a shockingly blunt manner.

[I]t is by the highest right that the Spaniards rule over those barbarians of the New World and the adjacent islands, people who in intelligence, native wit, and every sort of virtue and human feeling are as far surpassed by the Spaniards as children are by adults, as women are by men, as savage and fierce people are by the most gentle people, as the wildly intemperate are by those who are self-controlled and temperate and finally I might almost say: as apes are by human beings [*denique quam simiae prope dixerim ab hominibus*].¹⁶

Sepúlveda further asserts that their nature is extremely backward. He describes them as “such lesser humans [*homunculi*] in mind and manners, so barbarous, so uncultivated, so uncivilized [*inhumani*].¹⁷ Although he thinks they are not deprived of reason, unlike “bears” or “apes,” waging war against them is justified under the Spaniards’ Christian duty of helping them to achieve eternal salvation through religious conversion.¹⁸ Contrary to Las Casas, who argues that Indigenous Americans should have been converted without force and through gentle persuasion, Sepúlveda contends that persuasion alone would be insufficient and that armed forces were required to secure public preaching and prevent preachers from

being killed. Through subjection, “more progress is made in their conversion in one month than would be made in a hundred years through preaching alone.”¹⁹ The central question is whether Sepúlveda thinks of their subjection as chattels or serfs, or put differently, if Indigenous Americans are either “natural slaves” or “natural servants” subject to paying tribute.

Let me highlight some passages that exhibit the clear distinction that Sepúlveda makes between chattel slaves (*servi seu mancipia*) and free servants (*ministri conditionis liberae*). In one passage he explains that royal rule is akin to running a household: Great houses have sons and chattel slaves (*servi seu mancipia*), servants, and fathers who govern them all.²⁰ This passage is valuable because it demonstrates that Sepúlveda refers to Aristotle’s doctrine of natural slavery as chattel slavery. As for Indigenous Americans, he is of the opinion that their subjection is as free serfs: “These barbarians should be governed like servants—albeit free ones—[*ministros, sed liberos*] through a power that is a certain mixture of masterly and paternal power, and they ought to be treated in accord with their own condition.”²¹ Thus, Sepúlveda advocates for Indigenous Americans being free servants who ought to convert, with chattel slavery being permitted only as a form of punishment.²²

Notwithstanding this, one might still have the impression that this terminological analysis is sound but still insufficient to effectively address the general puzzle. Certainly, the *Democrates Secundus* is sometimes confusing and even contradictory. I believe this is what fuels the controversy over Sepúlveda’s position; for example, elsewhere Sepúlveda suggests that war is justified against those who “though they have been born to obey, reject rule.”²³ Because of passages like this, which suggest that their inferiority is innate, it is not surprising that Hanke and Castañeda have concluded that Indigenous Americans’ inferiority is seen as fixed in nature. Overall, the *Democrates Secundus* seems to be strategically evasive, possibly because Sepúlveda wanted to satisfy *both* his critics and readers who were part of the *encomienda*. In what follows, I back up my argument that Sepúlveda did not advocate for chattel or innate slavery with two further reasons that require looking to political writings other than the *Democrates Secundus*.

Over the years, Sepúlveda made his views on Indigenous Americans less belligerent and against chattel slavery much clearer. As mentioned above, he composed a more advanced “Salamanca” manuscript of the *Democrates Secundus* due to the adverse reactions he was receiving. The Salamanca manuscript suppresses the scandalous quasi-comparison between apes and Indigenous Americans and uses the pejorative term *homunculus* only once rather than three times. He also removes a long passage about the inferiority of the Aztecs. Because none of these manuscripts were issued a license, he managed to publish the *Apologia*, a relatively short piece that synthesizes and defends the *Democrates Secundus*, in Rome, not Spain, just before the great debate.²⁴ Right from the beginning, the *Apologia* states its opposition to the enslavement of Indigenous Americans: “I declare that those barbarians should not be plundered of their possessions and powers, nor should

they be reduced to slavery."²⁵ Additionally, shortly after the debate, he reinstates his opposition to chattel slavery in *Outrageous, Scandalous, Heretical Notions*. Here Sepúlveda does not refer to the slave-by-nature argument *at all* and his stance gains full clarity: "Once they [Indigenous Americans] have been subjugated, they should be neither killed nor enslaved nor stripped of their estates."²⁶ Also, for the first time, he expresses support for restoring excessive robbery of Indigenous Americans' property. Anything taken by force, aside from what can be lawfully seized in war, is robbery and must be restored.²⁷ Hence, it appears clear that Sepúlveda did not advocate for the chattel or innate slavery of Indigenous Americans. Below, more reasons are explored to support this claim and explicate the rationale of this conclusion.

3. WHAT IS "NATURAL" IN NATURAL SERVITUDE? CHRISTIAN EMPIRE, VIRTUE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Crucial questions remain despite the clarifications made above. Are Indigenous Americans ever expected to become equals to Spaniards once they convert to Christianity? Are they "naturally" condemned to remain "barbarians?" Also, what kind of *racial* prejudice (if any) underlies Sepúlveda's belligerent views on Indigenous Americans?

Considering what Castilla Urbano terms the Sepúlvedan "hierarchical political ontology" might help us to shape an effective reply.²⁸ Castilla Urbano observes that the Sepúlvedan political ontology is premised on the Aristotelian principle of ruling and obeying of both animate and inanimate beings, matter and form, all oriented towards perfection. Sepúlveda draws from the *Nicomachean Ethics* the idea that the irrational part of the soul should obey reason, and from the *Politics* that less intelligent beings ought to serve their superiors.²⁹ Drawing on Augustine, Sepúlveda complicates Aristotle's teleology by subordinating natural law to divine law.³⁰ Indeed, Sepúlveda regards God as the most perfect being to which all natural entities owe obedience. Importantly, he envisions the Spanish kingdom as the medium towards God and eternal salvation, as well as the continuation of the Greco-Latin tradition, albeit in a superior manner. Sepúlveda urged King Charles V to expand beyond the "New World" into minor Asia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Syria, Jerusalem, Egypt, and others, until the rest of the world eventually joined the Christian dominion.³¹ Hence, Sepúlveda considers the politics of religious conversion to be inextricable to Christian imperial expansion, not limited exclusively to Indigenous Americans.³² While the *Democrates Secundus* justifies waging just war against the former, his other writings do so against the Turks.

Although Castilla Urbano contextualizes Sepúlveda's hierarchical ontology within the Christian imperial project, the divine law, virtue, and politics, it overlooks Sepúlveda's notes on the environment. These very important notes establish a causal relationship between human "nature," intelligence, and virtue.³³ Sepúlveda references these connections briefly in the *Democrates Secundus* and the *Apologia*, grounding the rational deficiencies of Indigenous Americans: "Either on account of a climatic region in which

for the most part dull-witted people are found, or on account of evil habituation, by which men become virtually beastlike."³⁴ This line of thought goes back to Aristotle's seventh book of the *Politics*, which addresses the interplay between world regions, their climate, and the nature of "barbarians."³⁵ Aristotle notes that climatic zones have a causal influence on the formation of moral and intellectual character.³⁶ For instance, humans from cold European climates exhibit spiritedness yet lack the intellectual capacity to create well-ordered political communities. Hellenic people, in contrast, possess both spiritedness and intelligence because their climatic zone falls between extremes, resembling a geographical golden mean.

In his translation of Aristotle's *Politics* from Greek to Latin, Sepúlveda expanded these climate-related notes in ways that deserve attention. He explains that Greece, along with Italy and Spain, enjoy a privileged temperate climate that makes citizens docile enough for acquiring moral virtues.³⁷ In colder environments the blood becomes warmer, making people's nature more spirited yet unintelligent, and vice versa.³⁸ Likewise, excessive heat makes the body feel suffocated, dissolving natural strength and leading to weak bodily constitutions, as he observes among Africans and Ethiopians.³⁹ Interestingly, Sepúlveda locates the Americas within this southern, excessively warm hemisphere. He believes that climate matters to the extent that moral virtues tend to remain firm when aided by certain "blazes" (*llamaradas*) generated by temperate environments. Notwithstanding what Sepúlveda considers to be a corruptive hostile climate, he suggests that good laws, moral habituation, and practical reason may outweigh the disadvantages posed by environmental-related predispositions. In this sense, even Spanish citizens born to good fathers would *not* become automatically virtuous merely by living in favorable climates.⁴⁰ It appears that the same rule applies to Indigenous Americans: Religious conversion aims to provide them with a Christian moral education that functions as a corrective to their "natural" vices, which are shaped by their living in the southern hemisphere—although he does not elaborate on the extent of this influence.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of human beings, those born as natural masters and as natural slaves, the latter lacking deliberative powers (*phronesis*).⁴¹ Nonetheless, Aristotle does not raise the question of what would happen to "barbarians" over time once they settled in the privileged Greek environment. In other words, Aristotle does not dwell on climate and heredity in the way that Kant does. For the latter, regardless of any environmental impact, "differences between races were permanent and could be changed only by race mixing."⁴² Sepúlveda's understanding of the impact of the environment on moral character is more fluid than Kant's, although the former neither raises the question of what would happen to Spaniards and their offspring who settled in the heated climate of the "New World" for too long. In any event, Sepúlveda rejects the idea that the influence of the environment on character is permanent; he concludes that "these moral vices can be overcome either by habituation or by reason."⁴³ Elsewhere, Sepúlveda reiterates the idea that virtue only stems from the repetition of good actions and not from nature.⁴⁴

It is true that Sepúlveda rejects the idea that converted Indigenous Americans may enjoy equal legal status *vis-à-vis* Spaniards, but he also remarks that they should be treated more freely and generously once they become “more civilized.”⁴⁵ It remains unclear what specific rights they may gradually get to enjoy and how many years or generations this process might take. Nevertheless, I take all of what has been discussed thus far as evidence against the application of natural slavery in Aristotelian terms, which assumes that natural slavery is fixed, and in favor of religious conversion as a means for Indigenous Americans to overcome their alleged “natural” inferiority. In light of all of the evidence, it appears that Sepúlveda views Indigenous Americans as subjects who must be morally educated, much like children in the Aristotelian framework: Although children are capable of reason, they require tutelage, experience, and guidance to develop habits that are conducive to moral virtue and full humanity. The difference is that Sepúlveda adds Christian moral principles to that picture, including the need to secure the eternal salvation of Indigenous Americans. For Aristotle, the natural slave lacks practical deliberative power (*phronesis*), but it does not appear that Sepúlveda thought of Indigenous Americans in that way.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

This essay has reassessed the question of what Sepúlveda meant by *natura servi* beyond the formulations made in the *Democrates Secundus*. First, it has explained that Sepúlveda suggests that Indigenous Americans should be subjected to Spaniards as serfs rather than chattels. This is due to his careful use of terminology, but also because the main goal of their subjection was to secure their conversion to Christianity and, by extension, eternal life. The fact that over the years, Sepúlveda made his views less belligerent, explicitly opposing chattel slavery, lends further credence to this conclusion. Second, I have drawn on Sepúlveda’s notes on moral virtue and the environment. While these establish a causal link between excessively warm and cold world climates and a predisposition towards moral vice, Sepúlveda believes that this influence is not permanent. The moral vices that define “barbarians” are not fixed in nature. Rather, these could be overcome through habituation and Christian conversion regardless of environmental effects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Robert Bernasconi, Eduardo Mendieta, and Christopher Moore from the Philosophy Department at Penn State for their valuable comments on several drafts of this essay.

NOTES

- Bartolomé de Las Casas, “Contained Herein Is a Debate or Disputation (‘Aquí Se Contiene Una Disputa o Controversia’),” in *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion of the Americas: Defending Empire, Debating Las Casas* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).
- Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One. A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 66. Also see Domingo De Soto’s summary that states the purpose of the Disputation in Las Casas ([1552] 2023).
- The English translation that I read of the *Democrates Secundus* is that of Luke Glanville, David Luper, and Maya Feile Tomes: *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion of the Americas: Defending Empire, Debating Las Casas* (Oxford University Press, 2023).
- Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Indiana University Press, 1970); Ángel Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. A Través de Su “Epistolario” y Nuevos Documentos* (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1959).
- Sepúlveda’s *Apología* is a relatively short writing that he published in Rome in 1550 (not in Spain) because a license to publish the *Democrates Secundus* was not issued. For a careful analysis of these events, see Glanville et al., *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion of the Americas* and Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*.
- See the Introduction by Menendez y Pelayo in Manuel García Pelayo, “Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda y Los Problemas Jurídicos de La Conquista de América: Introducción,” in *Trafado Sobre Las Justas Causas de La Guerra Contra Los Indios*, by Juan Ginés Sepúlveda (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1941).
- This analysis was provided in Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*, 59. However, six years before, Hanke had already defined his position in “Bartolomé de Las Casas, an Essay in Hagiography and Historiography” *HAHR* XXXIII (1953): 135–51.
- Robert E. Quirk, “Some Notes on a Controversial Controversy: Juan Gines de Sepulveda and Natural Servitude,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 34, no. 3 (1954): 357.
- I should note that Hanke considers Quirk’s argument to be unsound, as Latin-Spanish dictionaries of that time made no substantial distinction between slavery and serfdom (Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*, 58–61). Conversely, Quirk believes that Spanish society differentiated between serfs and chattel slaves clearly. Serfs were part of the Christian society whereas Moors and Jews in Spain could not have become such by virtue of not being Christians. The slave was never a Spanish Christian, but a Negro, Moor, Turk, Guanche, even Greek or an Albanian captured in war or bought from Portuguese or Andalusian slave traders (Quirk, “Some Notes on a Controversial Controversy,” 361). There is evidence that Sepúlveda mentioned that the enslavement of fellow Christians would be impermissible because they were protected by the civil laws of the Kingdom. See Sepúlveda, “Democrates Part Two, on the Just Reasons for the War against the Indians,” in *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion of the Americas: Defending Empire, Debating Las Casas* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 160.
- Felipe Castañeda, “La Esclavitud Natural En Sepúlveda: De Los Escolios al I de La Política al Demócrates Segundo,” in *Aristóteles. Sobre La República – Libro I: Según La Traducción Latina y Escolios de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda* (Universidad de Los Andes, 2015), 217–29.
- Glanville et al., *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion*.
- Glanville et al., *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion*, 65.
- Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, 198. The evolution from this intermediate manuscript to the most advanced (*Salamanca*) is key and is because of the criticisms against Sepúlveda’s views. Most of the aforementioned scholars of the early and middle-twentieth century cite the intermediate manuscript inadvertently. For instance, Hanke became aware of this and revised the second edition of his work: *Aristotle and the American Indians* (1970). This intermediate manuscript was first published in a Spanish edition in 1892 and later prepared in a bilingual Latin-Spanish edition by the Mexican editorial “Fondo de Cultura Económica” (FCE) in 1941. Quirk used that edition, as did Enrique Dussel, a prominent Latin American philosopher, in his *The Invention of the Americas. Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, translated by Michael D. Barber (Continuum, 1995). Later, Hanke cited the most advanced manuscript prepared by Losada, removing the apes/Indigenous Americans quasi-comparison.
- Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, 367. This request occurred during a moment of intense polarization regarding the (mis) treatment of Indigenous Americans and the contents of the bull *Sublimis Deus* (1537). This bull, dictated by Pope Paul III, reaffirmed the humanity of Amerindians and their capacity to convert into the Christian faith. However, opinions were sharply divided. Some Spaniards believed that Indigenous Americans possessed full capacity for conversion and could even become priests, while others thought they should be enslaved. The latter view was influenced by an animalized prejudice comparing them with “dirty dogs,” in a similar vein to the derogatory term *perro*

moro used against the Moors. See Glanville et al., *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion*, 10; Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*.

15. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 101. I will address the quasi-comparison of apes with Indigenous Americans below. Moreover, references to the *Democrates Secundus* will be as “DS.”
16. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 110.
17. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 182.
18. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 113–14.
19. Sepúlveda, “The Defence of the Book, On the Just Reasons for War (Apologia pro Libro de Iustis Belli Causis).” In *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion of the Americas: Defending Empire, Debating Las Casas*, ed. Luke Glanville, David A. Luper, and Tomes Felie (Oxford University Press, 2023), 205.
20. This passage is inspired by Aristotle’s *Politics*, I.12 (1259a37–40), in *The Politics, and the Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
21. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 176. I have extracted the term “*ministros, sed liberos*” from the bilingual edition of García-Pelayo, “Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda y Los Problemas Jurídicos de La Conquista de América.” Overall, my own view on this linguistic controversy is in line with the analysis of Glanville et al. and Quirk, instead of Hanke and Casteñeda.
22. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 176.
23. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Secundus*, 100–101. In the Latin original, “*tum in eos homines, qui cum sint ad parendum nati, imperium recusant.*” See Sepúlveda, *Tratado Sobre Las Justas Causas de La Guerra Contra Los Indios*. Primera edición, Tercera reimpresión, trad. Menéndez y Pelayo (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), 86.
24. Once the Royal Council of the Indies heard about this unlicensed publication, it ordered its confiscation from Spain and the Americas. See Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*.
25. Sepúlveda, “The Defence of the Book,” 200.
26. Sepúlveda, “Outrageous, Scandalous, Heretical Notions,” in *Sepúlveda on the Spanish Invasion of the Americas: Defending Empire, Debating Las Casas* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 384.
27. Sepúlveda, “Outrageous, Scandalous, Heretical Notions.”
28. Francisco Castilla Urbano, *El Pensamiento de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda: Vida Activa, Humanismo y Guerra En El Renacimiento*. Historia de La Sociedad Política (Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2013); Castilla Urbano, “La Ontología Política de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda,” in *Aristóteles. Sobre La República – Libro I.: Según La Traducción Latina y Escolios de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda* (2015): 273–84.
29. *Nicomachean Ethics* (1102b32); *Politics* (1254b7-12).
30. Sepúlveda, “Democrates Primero o de La Incompatibilidad Entre La Milicia y La Religión Cristiana,” in *Tratados Políticos de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, ed. Ángel Losada, Colección Biblioteca Española de Escritores Políticos (Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1963), 189.
31. See Sepúlveda, “Exhortación a La Guerra Contra Los Turcos,” in *Tratados Políticos de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, ed. Ángel Losada, Colección Biblioteca Española de Escritores Políticos (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1963), 24–27; and “Sobre El Reino y Los Deberes Del Rey,” in *Tratados Políticos de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, ed. Ángel Losada, Colección Biblioteca Española de Escritores Políticos (Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1963), 65.
32. The question of the extent to which Sepúlveda theorized about enslaving prisoners of war as punishment is not addressed sufficiently in his writings and ultimately falls beyond the scope of this essay.
33. Similarly, Casteñeda leaves out these climate-related notes without adequate explanation. See “La Esclavitud Natural En Sepúlveda,” 137 and 162.
34. Sepúlveda, “The Defence of the Book, On the Just Reasons for War,” 202.
35. Aristotle, *The Politics* (1327b20-31).
36. In the translation of Aristotle’s *Politics* consulted, Everson (*The Politics, and the Constitution of Athens*) translates “peoples” as “races.” I am cautious, however, about projecting the concept of “race” onto the Antiquity. In any event, it is evident that Aristotle is theorizing about different kinds of people and the constitution of their characters.
37. Sepúlveda, *Del Reino*, in *Tratados Políticos de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, ed. Ángel Losada, Colección Biblioteca Española de Escritores Políticos (Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1963), 117.
38. Sepúlveda, *Del Reino; Escolios a la Política*, ed. Felipe Casteñeda y Andrea Lozano-Vásquez (Grupo de Traducción de Latín, Universidad de Los Andes, 2015), 130. “*Escolios a la Política*” are Sepúlveda’s footnotes to his translation of Aristotle’s *Politics*. His comments on the seventh book of the *Politics* are generous and refer to world climates and their relationship with virtue and human constitutions.
39. Sepúlveda, *Del Reino*, 118.
40. Sepúlveda, *Del Reino*, 118; *Demócrates Primero*, 231. This line of thought is almost identical to that of Aristotle in the *Politics*: “Nature intends to do this often [moral goodness being transmitted] but cannot” (1255b3).
41. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a14.
42. Robert Bernasconi, “Racialization and the Construction of Religions,” in *Critical Philosophy of Race* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 45. Bernasconi also warns against projecting biological racism onto discourses related to religion and climate since this period is distant from twentieth-century biology. Bernasconi, “Racialization and the Construction of Religions,” 49.
43. Sepúlveda, *Del Reino*, 119. In Losada’s Spanish translation: “Estos vicios se superan, ya con la costumbre de buenas acciones, ya con la razón.”
44. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Primus*, 186. “Las virtudes morales no nos vienen dadas por naturaleza . . . sino que nacen de una costumbre de bien obrar.”
45. Sepúlveda, *Democrates Primus, Democrates Secundus*, 175–76.
46. Sepúlveda demonstrates a sound understanding of the role of *phronesis* as foundational to the other virtues. He refers to it as “straight reason” (*recta razón*) and *prudencia* (see *Democrates Primus*, 186. Without a doubt, our understanding of Sepúlveda’s uptake of Aristotelian ethics and its relation to Christian morality would be greatly enhanced if we had access to his translation and commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and other ethical works. Thanks to Losada, *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, 573, we know that such translation exists; unfortunately, as of now, it remains lost.

2024 Annual Report on the Society for Mexican American Philosophy

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The Society for Mexican American Philosophy (SMAP) was founded in 2015 and in the last decade has grown from a handful of members to a healthy one-hundred-plus international membership. SMAP has maintained and strengthened its dedication to the support and promotion of Mexican American philosophy in all of its diverse manifestations. It seeks to provide a venue for inquiry into philosophical issues that are of particular concern for Mexican Americans and, more broadly, persons of Latin American descent. To this end, the society is particularly interested in social justice issues (e.g., imperialism,

colonization, immigration, civil and human rights, race, gender, discrimination, and language) as well as issues pertaining to identity and citizenship in its various forms (e.g., social, political, or cultural). It supports historical and contemporary research on Mexican philosophy, including the philosophies of Mexico's indigenous peoples and current work on indigeneity. SMAP also supports scholars who are or wish to become actively engaged in their communities by providing a venue to present civically engaged scholarship. With this mission in mind, the SMAP Executive Board is pleased to provide an annual report to the *APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues*.

Last year, 2024, was a busy, yet productive, time for SMAP. We kicked off the year with several panels organized by Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa at the APA Eastern Division meeting. These included an author-meets-critics panel featuring the new translation of the *Discourses of the Elders* (Huehuetlatolli) by Sebastian Purcell, with critiques by Álvaro Sottil de Aguinaga, Obed Frausto, and Paulina Guajardo. The second APA Eastern panel on Sor Juana Inés De la Cruz Aesthetics was organized and chaired by Sergio Gallegos-Ordorica and featured presentations by Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa, Paulina Ezquerro, and Bertín Ortega-Polito. At the end of January, with the sponsorship of the APA Committee on Hispanics/Latinx, Rocio Mercedes Alvarez organized a roundtable discussion for the APA's Virtual Programming Committee on "Teaching Latin American Philosophy in the Anglosphere." The roundtable featured expert commentary and insights by SMAP members including Kim Diaz, Manuel Vargas, Sergio Gallegos-Ordorica, Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Andrew Soto, and José Jorge Mendoza. For anyone interested in the discussion, it is available for viewing on the APA's [On Demand page](#).

SMAP was also present at the APA Central and Pacific Division meetings and retains a space as an invited panel at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (SAAP) conference, in great part due to the organizing of Kim Diaz, who has organized invited SMAP panels there for eight years. Grant J. Silva organized the SMAP panels at the APA Central meeting, during which José Jorge Mendoza chaired two sessions. The first, "Latinx Perspectives on Canon Formation," featured talks by Carlos A. Sánchez and Robert E. Sanchez, and was organized in collaboration with the APA's Committee on Hispanics/Latinxs. The second panel, "Racism and Latinx Peoples," featured the work of César Cabezas, Grant J. Silva, and Alberto G. Urquidez.

At the APA Pacific meeting, two SMAP panels were organized by Alejandro Santana. The first panel, "Topics in Mexican American Philosophy," was chaired by Manuela Alejandra Gomez and featured new work by José-Antonio Orosco, Sebastian Purcell, and Randall Rodriguez. The second panel was chaired by Noell Bironde and focused on the philosophy of Jorge Portilla, featuring new scholarship by Andrew Lopez, Ricardo Friaiz, and Karina Ortiz Villa. Three additional sessions at the Pacific meeting were also heavily represented by SMAP members. Those included (1) an APA Graduate Student Council Panel chaired by Aubriel Harrington on Latina Feminism, featuring the work of Cynthia Paccacerqua, Mariana Alessandri, and Manuela Alejandra Gomez; (2) an invited symposium on Latin

American Feminist Philosophy both organized and chaired by Manuela Alejandra Gomez with talks delivered by Rocio Mercedes Alvarez and Mariana Alessandri, followed by the comments of At-Ziry Torres; and (3) another invited symposium, organized by Manuela Alejandra Gomez and chaired by Alejandro Santana, on "What Does It Mean to Be a Philosopher?" featuring speakers Boomer Trujillo and Crisol Escobedo, with comments by Aaron Alvarez. SMAP continued its strong ties with the SAAP with an invited panel, organized and chaired by Kim Diaz, that featured work by Ivory Morrisa Day, Kayla J. Aceves, and Julio Covarrubias.

At the APA Pacific meeting, SMAP's Executive Board held its first in-person, town hall-style meeting since SMAP's 2017 inaugural conference. The meeting was attended by roughly twenty members in person and a handful of members via Zoom. This meeting provided SMAP's Executive Board with an opportunity to express our gratitude to the society's membership and offer a "State of the Society" presentation. We were also able to gain mandates on several discussions and projects going forward, including questions on conference planning, membership dues, applying for 501(c)(3) non-profit status, and a position on making public statements.

While the first half of the year gave SMAP the opportunity to connect in the physical realm, SMAP membership also stayed connected virtually with the continuation of our very popular SMAP Virtual Speaker Series and the creation of the Indigenous Mesoamerican Philosophy Reading group. The 2024 Speaker Series began with Ariana Peruzzi's "Persecution in the Context of Asylum: Beyond State Violence," held in February. In June, Grant J. Silva presented his paper titled "From Social Domination to Mental Domination: On the Nature of the Mind and Society in James Baldwin's, 'A Talk to Teachers'." Daniel Campos delivered a discussion on "Play and Latin American Sport Philosophy" in August, and Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa offered a detailed presentation on "Echos and Mirrors: Imitation and Repetition in Sor Juana as Tools for Innovation" in September. Finally, Lori Gallegos graced our November Virtual Speaker Series with an engaging presentation titled "Love It or Leave It: Considering the Costs of Affective Assimilation." In October, Jim Maffie and Alejandro Santana organized a virtual reading group focusing on Indigenous Mesoamerican philosophy that has created a space for SMAP members interested in beginning study in this specialized area.

As SMAP prepares for another busy year of panels across the country, the speaker series in the virtual landscape, and some additional reading groups, we look forward to adding our first ever SMAP Summer Institute to the 2025 agenda. The SMAP Summer Institute will be held at the University of Portland on June 6–8. It will not only provide SMAP members (and soon-to-be members) with a venue to share new research, but also to collaborate and learn from each other as a community and *familia* with workshops on how to navigate new research, publishing, and life in and outside of the academy. The Summer Institute will also feature a keynote by the renowned historian David Carrasco, who has graciously accepted our invitation and is excited to become a part of our humble society.

Finally, SMAP's Executive Board is proud to announce the generous funding it has received. To begin with, SMAP was awarded the 2024–2025 \$10,000 APA Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant. We also received generous support from various sources at the University of Portland: Dr. Amy Ongiri, Director of the Ethnic Studies Program; the Philosophy Department; Bill and Karla Cloran, who founded the Indigenous Peoples Project fund; the E. John and Cleo Rumpakis Hellenic Studies Program fund; the Garaventa Center; and the Dundon Berchtold Institute. Altogether, this funding will enable us to host the 2025 Summer Institute and help SMAP in its mission to continue providing a welcoming and supportive space for the community it serves!

For more information on SMAP activities, please visit our website (www.mexicanamericanphilosophy.org), where you can also join our mailing list, get involved, and register for the 2025 SMAP Summer Institute.

Approved by SMAP Executive Board:

Alejandro Santana, President
Manuela Alejandra Gomez, Vice-President
Rocio Mercedes Alvarez, Secretary
José Jorge Mendoza, Treasurer

AUTHOR BIOS

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Stefan Terrazas is a PhD student in philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. His research interests lie at the intersection of Hispanic and Latin American philosophy, the history of social and political thought, decolonial philosophy, and the critical philosophy of race. His work examines the continuity of early colonial thought with later philosophical approaches to race and nation-building in Latin America.



APA STUDIES ON

Native American and Indigenous Philosophy

JOSEPH LEN MILLER, MANAGING EDITOR

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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Joseph Len Miller
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

This is our first issue of *APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy* which will include a new, ongoing series entitled, “Key Concepts in Indigenous Philosophy.” In each issue we will try to include a few brief (in terms of length—not depth) pieces in which Indigenous philosophers write about how they would define or explain a particular concept that is central to Indigenous philosophy. Our reviewers and the APA Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy thought this would be a good series to include in the journal because not only does it offer a streamlined, accessible resource for people wanting to engage with Native American and Indigenous philosophy, but it also highlights the diversity of thought when it comes to key concepts in Indigenous philosophy. Since this is our first issue in which we’re doing this, the question we posed to our two authors, Ashley Lance (Blue Lake Rancheria Tribal Member, Yurok Descendant) of Cambridge University and Getty Lustila (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma) of Northeastern University, was incredibly broad but foundational. Before considering key concepts in Native American and Indigenous philosophy in future issues, it will be important to get contrasting conceptions of what exactly constitutes Indigenous philosophy. Thus, the first two contributions in this series are offering their takes on answering the question, “What is Indigenous philosophy?”

After these wonderfully insightful pieces, we have three articles that each, in one way or another, focus on the application of Indigenous philosophy to contemporary concepts and practices. First, we have “Critiques of Colonial Scholarship” by undergraduate student Tristan Gosselin (Red River Métis) of the University of Toronto. In this paper, Gosselin explores Indigenous scholarship for colonial critiques of the work of philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan. By engaging with Lonergan’s work in a decolonial manner, Gosselin does an incredible job of highlighting examples of what constitutes a colonial critique, as well as demonstrating how those critiques can be applied to more contemporary figures like Lonergan. Second, Rene Ramirez from Loyola University Chicago turns “to Vine Deloria Jr.’s (Lakota) writings on time and place to formulate what a Place-based account of time entails”¹ in “Local Time: A Placed-Based Account of Time in Vine Deloria Jr.’s Various Works.” As Ramirez states, “where theorists have adeptly outlined the weaponization of temporality under Western

coloniality, they have yet to offer a particular account of time that favors indigenous resistance.”² It is towards this end that Ramirez draws from Deloria Jr. to explain how his conception of *local time* is grounded in particularities involving location and communal relations, and is cyclically arranged. Lastly, we have “Wahkootowin Vegetarianism: When Is It Okay to Eat Your Kin?” by John R. Miller (Métis Nation) from the University of Toronto. In this paper Miller draws “on the ethical principles of the Métis nation to argue that for most Métis people, it is now impermissible to kill animals for their meat.”³ The way he makes this argument, however, is to articulate the conditions that would morally permit Métis people to hunt and consume animals. Given the *demandingness* of these conditions, Miller concludes that they do not apply to most Métis people, and, as such, “most Métis people ought to be vegetarians, according to principles drawn from our own tradition.”

We are thrilled to be able to include each of these pieces in our spring issue. Not only do they represent the diversity of topics in Indigenous philosophy, but they also do a wonderful job of subtly highlighting key concepts, applications, and the commonalities of Indigenous philosophy. Hopefully, this issue contributes to our continual aim of striking a balance between explaining Indigenous concepts and frameworks and addressing contemporary issues faced by Indigenous peoples and communities. We hope that these articles serve as a way of honoring our traditions, ideas, and ancestors, as well as invite readers to engage with Native American or Indigenous philosophy.

NOTES

1. Ramirez, “Local Time,” in this issue, 9.
2. Ramirez, “Local Time,” in this issue, 9.
3. Miller, “Wahkootowin Vegetarianism,” in this issue, 9.

FROM THE CHAIR

With Respect and Gratitude: Avoiding Epistemic Servitude and Epistemilation

Joseph Len Miller
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

Last summer, I had the honor of serving as one of the “experts” on Indigenous philosophy for **NEWLAMP** (The Northeast Workshop to Learn About Multicultural Philosophy) along with **Getty Lustila** (Choctaw Nation, Northeastern University), **Yann Allard-Tremblay** (Huron-

Wendat First Nation, McGill University), and [Shelbi Nawhilet Meissner](#) (Luiseño and Cupeño, University of Maryland). This workshop, graciously and wonderfully organized by [Candice Delmas](#) (Northeastern University),¹ was “designed to give philosophy teachers the tools to approach, and successfully integrate in their general undergraduate courses, contemporary issues in Native American, Indigenous and Land-Based social and political philosophy.” It was an incredibly moving and enriching experience given the wonderful participants² that attended the workshop, and I appreciate everyone who contributed.

One of the main things that was focused on was how to engage *respectfully* with Native American or Indigenous philosophy. As a follow-up to that workshop, I wanted to convey some thoughts that I know have been exchanged between Indigenous peoples doing philosophy. Whenever discussing Indigenous ideas or Indigenous frameworks, invariably, someone will ask something like, “Oh, is this like Spinoza’s such-and-such?” While most of the time this seems to be a well-intended attempt at understanding an unfamiliar concept, there are plenty of times where it’s dismissive—and, despite the best intentions, can be discouraging or even harmful. I can only speak from personal experience, but, as an example, once during a job interview, I had someone ask me if the Indigenous conceptions of “nature” were similar to Spinoza’s conception of God. As I was unfamiliar with Spinoza, I said I didn’t know.³ What followed was a “conversation” wherein I was made to feel like I didn’t understand Indigenous philosophy because I was unfamiliar with Spinoza’s work. Everything I said was being translated into Spinoza-speak, and everything I was told, I had to try and translate (to the best of my ability) into Indigenous-philosophical-terms. Rather than my interlocutors trying to understand Indigenous philosophy, it felt like I was being tasked with understanding Spinoza.

This experience isn’t the only time this kind of thing has occurred to me, but it’s one that stuck with me since 1) it was during a job interview, and 2) it was one of the more combative instances of, if I’m being *extremely* charitable, someone trying to understand or engage with Indigenous philosophy. Since our committee and journal editors want to encourage non-Indigenous people to engage with Indigenous philosophy more frequently, I thought this would be a good space to discuss some things to keep in mind when wanting to engage with Indigenous philosophy in a respectful manner (as the participants at NEWLAMP did). As such, I offer the following forms of epistemic injustices as examples of things to avoid when engaging with Indigenous philosophy.

There are two forms of epistemic injustice that I’d like highlight as occurring frequently against Indigenous peoples in academic contexts. I’ve labeled these injustices as *epistemic servitude* and *epistemilation*.⁴ Epistemic servitude occurs when someone’s ideas are used merely in the service of justifying or promoting another person’s ideas. In other words, when an idea is taken out of one context (i.e., worldview) and used to justify an idea in a different worldview, epistemic servitude has been committed. This is an injustice because it completely ignores or diminishes the relevant contexts in which the idea developed. Aside

from being epistemically bad, this is morally problematic given the vast history of this kind of erasure that Indigenous peoples continue to endure. This isn’t just disrespectful—it’s a consequence and continuation of settler colonialism. Epistemilation occurs when a distinctive idea from one person or group is explained in terms that subsume that idea as being a part of another particular system of knowledge (or a particular “worldview”). Though seemingly similar to epistemic servitude, this injustice occurs when an idea from one worldview is dismissed or not engaged with *on its own terms* because it is assumed to be either identical or similar enough to another idea in another worldview. This is an injustice because, again, it ignores or diminishes the context (e.g., the history, culture, a particular language, etc.) in which the idea developed. However, it’s also uniquely unjust because it, perhaps indirectly, prioritizes or privileges Western, Anglo-philosophical thoughts and traditions. In both cases, the context or worldview in which an idea developed is ignored or diminished, but they differ, oddly enough, in how they treat or compare Indigenous ideas and concepts with more familiar or Western concepts. In cases of epistemic servitude, Indigenous thought is taken to be good enough to be taken out of its particular context or worldview. It’s used to justify Western claims and practices (i.e., claims and practices that exist in, and developed out of, Western contexts) that are perhaps difficult to justify in Western terms (i.e., it’s greater than). In cases of epistemilation, Indigenous thought is taken to *not* be good enough to be taken out of its particular context or worldview. Indigenous thought isn’t understood, or engaged with, in its particular context (i.e., it’s less than). In either case, Indigenous thought is used for whatever purpose helps the settlers. It’s used in the service of settler colonialism.

The aim here isn’t to shame anyone who has committed these injustices—I’m sure most of us that have ever tried or desired to do comparative philosophy have either made these mistakes or come close. The aim is to highlight and name these injustices so that they can be brought to the attention of teachers and researchers wanting to engage with Native American or Indigenous philosophy.

As frequently as these occur, and as hard as they can be to avoid sometimes, I’m encouraged and hopeful given my recent experiences with people wanting to engage with Native American or Indigenous thought. I generally assume no ill will or bad intentions when these occur, but I want to make sure it’s clear that even if that’s the case, these practices still ought to be avoided.

Part of me wants to see these injustices optimistically—“if these are occurring (without malice), that means people are trying to, or at least want to, understand and engage with Indigenous philosophy!” While growing interest in Native American and Indigenous philosophy is great, these sorts of engagements still perpetuate a hierarchy of thought in philosophy that makes increasing diversity and inclusivity more difficult. And yet, as hard as it may be at times to increase diversity and inclusivity, it’s still happening. Things, it seems, are getting better (albeit slowly). I’m encouraged by Indigenous graduate students that I’ve met who are engaging with Indigenous thought despite little-to-

no infrastructural support or resources. I'm encouraged by the "academic elders"⁵ who cleared our path and continue to work in Indigenous philosophy despite having gone through much more of a struggle than most of us working in it nowadays. I'm encouraged by the increasing number of Indigenous philosophers that I continue to randomly meet (at conferences, in reading groups, through email, etc.). I'm encouraged by the increased presence of Indigenous philosophy at the APA conferences, as well as the increase in job postings seeking people who work in Indigenous or decolonial thought. I'm encouraged that my own department at West Chester University has actively taken steps to decolonize our curriculum and courses (soon I'll be able to teach upper- and lower-level courses on Native American philosophy!). I'm encouraged by the work that my colleagues in the APA's Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers⁶ are doing, as well as the work done by our journal's reviewers.⁷ I'm encouraged by the development of Philosophy of Indigenous Education (PINE)⁸ and the activities they've undertaken. I'm encouraged by the people who, albeit too cautiously sometimes, ask me and my peers about Indigenous philosophy. I'm encouraged by the organizers and participants at NEWLAMP—I encourage all of us wanting to engage with Indigenous thought to aspire to engage with it in the manner that they did. And I'm encouraged by those of you that are reading this. Mvto (thank you).

All these encouraging developments and occurrences make the need to avoid these epistemic injustices even more important. Simply engaging with Indigenous thought isn't enough to help diversify philosophy and make it more inclusive. The engagement has to be done respectfully. Just as merely adding an Indigenous author to your syllabus doesn't mean you've "decolonized" your reading list or course, memorizing things about Indigenous philosophy (e.g., concepts, arguments, inference patterns, stories, etc.) doesn't count as *knowing* Indigenous philosophy if you have to commit epistemic injustices to understand—and it certainly doesn't count as respectful engagement. While I hope the discipline takes some time to be grateful for the increased interest in Indigenous thought, I also hope that we'll take some time to reflect on *how* we're engaging with Indigenous thought and that we make sure we do it vrakkueckv (respectfully).

NOTES

1. Co-organizers include Alexander Guerrero (Rutgers University), Helena de Bres (Wellesley College), Gina Schouten (Harvard University), and Nancy Bauer (Tufts University).
2. Mvto (thank you) to Emmalon Davis (University of Michigan), Rebecca Leiby (Elon University), Michaila Peters (Boston College), Mariana Beatriz Noé (Harvard University), Dana Francisco Miranda (University of Massachusetts Boston), Alida Liberman (Southern Methodist University), Jeanine Weekes Schroer (University of Minnesota Duluth), Michelle Saint (Arizona State University), Sandra Raponi (Merrimack College), Andréa Davenport (California State University, San Bernardino), James Garrison (Baldwin Wallace University), Cara Green (Colorado College), Aaron Lawler (Waubensee Community College), Sarah Kizuk (Skidmore College), Robin Muller (California State University), Andrew Frederick Smith (Drexel University), Christopher Blake-Turner (Oklahoma State University), Madeline Ward (Western New England University), Margaret Betz (Rutgers University), Nicole Dular (Notre Dame of Maryland University), Gretchen Ellefson (Southern Utah University), Susan Stark (Bates

College), Timothy M. Kwiatek (Cornell University), Stephen Minister (Augustana University), P.B Hope (Stanford University), Emma Prendergast (Utah Tech University), Juan Carlos González (Colby College), and Maggie Castor (Stony Brook University).

3. I also didn't know what they meant by "Indigenous conceptions of 'nature,'" but that's now irrelevant.
4. I imagine this being pronounced similarly to 'assimilation.' However, if I've spelled it poorly, I'd be happy for someone to spell it in such a way as to make the pronunciation obvious.
5. People like Anne Waters, Brian Burkhart, and Kyle Whyte, as well as those who have passed including Viola F. Cordova and Vine Deloria Jr.
6. Brian Burkhart, Andrew Smith, Getty Lustila, Kat Wehrheim, Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner, and Alessandro R. Moscaritolo Palacio.
7. Anne Waters, Agnes Curry, and Andrea Sullivan-Clarke.
8. Getty Lustila, Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner, Janella Baxter, John Miller, and Ashley Lance.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in *APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy*. Work submitted goes through anonymous peer review. Our project in this journal is to engage in scholarly and pedagogical conversations that further develop this field in its integrity. We accept work that foregrounds these philosophical perspectives. We also accept work that addresses the professional and community concerns regarding Native American and indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. This is an inherently decolonial project. **We do not accept work that engages merely in comparative exercises or uses Native American and Indigenous philosophy merely to solve the philosophical or practical problems generated by Western thinking.**

We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional and community concerns regarding Native American and indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats including but not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats. In all cases, however, references should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and include endnotes rather than in-text citations. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the [APA website](#). Please submit material electronically to Joseph Miller (JMiller4@wcupa.edu). For consideration for the fall 2025 issue, please submit your work by June 15, 2025.

KEY CONCEPTS IN INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY: WHAT IS *INDIGENOUS* PHILOSOPHY?

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As an Indigenous person from California, it would be inappropriate not to acknowledge the wildfires that recently devastated Los Angeles and the surrounding areas. In part, this reflection on Indigenous philosophy is driven by some of the discourse that inherently follows any wildfire—that is, questions of how this fire could have been prevented. While there are many answers to fire prevention, especially those that prioritize the impacts of climate change, one area I want to connect to the question of Indigenous philosophy is the use of traditional ecological knowledge for controlled burns.

Where, in the past, it has felt that people were generally unaware of the practices of controlled burning by tribes in California, it is now (usually) consistently brought into the conversation. How it gets discussed is what I want to focus on. Online, while there are often articles that address the topic in a balanced and informed manner, there are still people discussing these practices in a less than useful way. In one instance, there was a TikTok where a person began by stating they were going to share a piece of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom that was taught to them. What was shared? That tribes have practiced controlled burns. The comment section thanked the person for sharing. Some comments went further. In one instance a commenter shared that they had done a cleansing and reading of their new house in LA, and they felt like mother earth was mad.

What's this have to do with Indigenous philosophy? I think that Indigenous philosophy can help us explain why this type of discourse about Indigenous practices, especially those that are as important as controlled burns, is both unhelpful and patronizing. In the first instance, Indigenous philosophy is something that can help us evaluate the epistemic landscape of statements like the above—being willing to ask questions like who shared this knowledge with you? What people? Are you allowed to be sharing this? Questions like these emphasize respectful and appropriate approaches to knowledge sharing and highlights immediately where the poster goes wrong. Here, what is wrong with the post is not just the language being used, or that the “wisdom” being shared is something that is basic and well known, but that at every step it demonstrates how to not interact with Indigenous knowledge—by appealing to stereotypes, by being unspecific, and by not considering the potential impacts of knowledge sharing.

As a contrast, there is a moment in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* where Lauren is attempting to get her friend to seek out more knowledge for survival:

“Read this.” I handed her one of the plant books. This one was about California Indians, the plants

they used, and how they used them—an interesting, entertaining little book. . . . “So we learn to eat grass and live in the bushes?” she muttered.

“We learn to survive,” I said.¹

We learn no information about what this book is, which tribes it documents, or how Lauren's father came into possession of this book. In some ways, the complaints I have about the post seem relevant here. But what I want to emphasize from this short passage is the defense of knowledge by Lauren, that it cannot be reduced to eating grass but is integral for survival.

Butler's novel is currently being called prophetic—for its prediction of a large wildfire in Los Angeles, around this exact date in 2025. However, the novel imagines California Indians as a piece of the past, even if our knowledge is a key to survival. What Indigenous philosophy can and should be is a way to keep us in the present and future. Its primary function is to help us negotiate and think through our relationships with each other, the land, and knowledge. The wildfires in California are one instance where Indigenous philosophy reminds us of the stakes of applying and sharing our traditional knowledges.

Indigenous philosophy is learning to survive.

NOTES

1. O. E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (London: Headline Publishing Group, 1993), 50–51.

Getty L. Lustila
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

The first time I was asked the question “What is Indigenous philosophy?” in earnest was by a student the first day of my course PHIL 2492: Indigenous Philosophy at Northeastern University. I remember feeling vulnerable, and even a bit annoyed. After all, this student did not understand the cardinal rule: never ask a philosopher what philosophy is. This breach of protocol was compounded by the fact that, here I was, an early career Native philosopher unsure of what it meant for me to be Indigenous.

Sure, I am an enrolled member of my tribe, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. However, outside of voting in tribal elections, learning Chata (which no one in my family speaks), and engaging in ceremony, I was often unclear on what it meant to be Choctaw, much less Indigenous. Yes, I know: “sing in me, oh muse, and through me tell the tale of the urban Native.” I am not here to go on about walking in two worlds—others more competent than myself have that covered—only to say that life flashed before my eyes when asked that question and I have been thinking about it since.

And no, this is not the part where I give you the answer to that question. Not because I am playing at being the medicine man but because I am still not sure. I *am* sure there is a joke in there somewhere, perhaps multiple ones, though I will leave that to the reader. What I can tell

you is what I have learned through teaching Indigenous philosophy. But first, a story.

This past semester was the most difficult of my career, and there was a day that marked amongst my lowest days generally. On that day, I decided to postpone our scheduled discussion and take the students outside. After sitting down—the grass was wet—which made this uncomfortable, and looking at each other a bit dumbfounded—which is always uncomfortable—I asked them a question, which also happened to be the theme of our course: “What does it mean to be a good relative?”

What followed was a winding discussion about the nature of relationality, how to build communities that create the conditions for being good relatives to one another, and what to do with folks that seemed hell bent on being bad ones. Throughout there was a bit of crying, a few laughs, and a couple heated moments, none of which seemed to derail the intense thinking and caring that we were doing with and for each other in the moment. After the allotted time passed, I stopped and said:

“Well, we just did it.”

“What did we do?”

“We tried our hand at being good relatives.”

There was a collective groan, a few eyerolls—but everyone was grinning. My students had long before identified my flare for the dramatic.

When class was over the problems we identified still existed. They still felt hopeless, or at least bigger than one person or one generation. But for a few moments on that unseasonably warm afternoon, we caught each other and saw the promise held out by working to be a better relative. For my Native students this meant listening to their aunts (a joke); for my non-Native students, it meant acting to remember that they were *in fact* relatives (not a joke). For all of us it meant reckoning with the persisting realities of settler colonialism, the way that these realities contribute to the dispossession of Indigenous lands and life, and how they seemingly obstruct the possibility of real friendship and community.

Big thoughts, even paralyzingly so on an otherwise difficult day. But we all knew that the work did not stop there. In some ways it had just begun, and would need to begin again, and again. So, what is the point? After all this, what is Indigenous philosophy? I am still not sure. All I know is it is what we were doing on that November day. And for me, this urbanite Choctaw two-world walker, it is enough to begin again, to create those spaces and to work to be present in them when I can.

“I thought we were going to get a definition of Indigenous philosophy. Oh well, skoden.”

ARTICLES

Critiques of Colonial Scholarship

Tristan Gosselin

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

INTRODUCTION

The objective of my work was to engage the scholarship of Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984) through the lens of decoloniality. To achieve this objective, the research procedure was divided into two phases. The first phase required an examination of Indigenous scholarship, primarily in the fields of philosophy and theology, to formulate a collection of colonial critiques present throughout the literature. The second phase required an examination of Bernard Lonergan’s work to identify the colonial structures present in his scholarship, informed by the aforementioned collection of colonial critiques. I identified four pertinent critiques that appear throughout Lonergan’s scholarship: the linear conception of time, the disregard for spatial particularities, the promotion of individualism, and the employment of the *colonial gaze*. The following work has divorced these critiques from their original application by Lonergan to instead present a broader analysis of the ideological and epistemic tools weaponized within settler-states’ ideological apparatuses (e.g., colonial scholarship) to valorize Indigenous land dispossession.

WHAT IS COLONIAL SCHOLARSHIP?

Eve and Tuck assert that “decolonisation is not a metaphor”¹ and instead posit that decolonization refers exclusively to the undoing of Indigenous land dispossession. If decolonization is the undoing of Indigenous land dispossession, then “settler-colonial scholarship” can be understood as a body of work that produces, perpetuates, or normalizes Indigenous dispossession.

CRITIQUE 1: COLONIAL SCHOLARSHIP CONCEPTUALIZES TIME AS LINEAR

Colonial scholarship promotes a linear conception of time. This informs the relationship between the passage of time and progress, which can be understood as “progressive”² history. In his 1972 book, *God is Red*, Vine Deloria Jr. critiques colonialism’s linear conception of time by illuminating the constructed relationship between the passage of time and progress. As Deloria succinctly writes, “the very essence of Western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion.”³ He further expands upon this point by asserting that the Western European identity functions with the assumption that at a point in its linear narrative, it had become the global leader.⁴ The significance of a linear conception of time to the supremacy of Western European identity explains its prioritization of temporality over spatiality.⁵ Therefore, the Western European identity and its accompanying normative beliefs are not understood as the product of a particular spatial context, but rather understood temporally as the exemplification of “progression.” This identity then

becomes the metric by which all other identities and normative beliefs are comparatively measured.

Deloria asserts that a linear conception of time is analogous to the “doctrine of cultural evolution.”⁶ Non-adherence to its norms then supposes inferiority, and subsequently natural elimination under this doctrine. Therefore, a linear conception of time naturalizes the elimination of Indigenous peoples. Because the normative beliefs of Indigenous peoples do not adhere to those of the settler-colonial project, they cease to exist contemporarily. Instead, Indigenous peoples represent a stage of cultural progression that the colonial project has advanced from. This illustrates why settler-colonial historical narratives are often “narrow in scope, singular and isolated,”⁷ as they must construct the cultural evolution that has resulted in settler supremacy. Settler scholarship often promotes the narrative that Indigenous peoples are timeless, or represent an antiquated people of the land they now inhabit. In this narrative, the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the contemporary age leases the land to settler-colonial interests.

Franz Fanon asserts that “colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country”⁸ but that it also “turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”⁹ According to Fanon, historical narratives are paramount to forming a national identity.¹⁰ As previously demonstrated, Eurocentricity is the metric by which all other cultures are comparatively measured. Eurocentric historical narratives are not content in simply antiquating a contemporary people, but must also impose value-judgments upon that antiquated people, ultimately to promote notions of Indigenous barbarity or incompetence in comparison to settler civility.

The settler-colonial state apparatuses mobilize historical narratives to construct national identity. Colonial scholarship’s progressive historical narratives fabricate the normative narrative of Western evolution that ranges from the ancient Greek empire, to the ancient Roman empire, to the medieval era, to the renaissance, and then to the Enlightenment. The contemporary settler-colonial nation is posited as the heir to the excellence of past civilisations. The excellency of the Ancient Roman empire then does not reflect the excellency of the settler-colonial nation, but rather demonstrates a excellency that the nation has surpassed. As “guardians of the world,”¹¹ ordained by a progressive history, Western Europeans became the arbiter of order. Deloria expresses that this notion of supremacy inspired “Crusades, the Age of Exploration, the Age of Imperialism, and the recent crusade against Communism.”¹² This ideology illustrates settler-colonial project’s doctrine of Indigenous land dispossession. As arbiters of order, the agents of settler-colonialism were affirmed by the notion that they could optimize the land better than its original inhabitants could.¹³

CRITIQUE 2: COLONIAL SCHOLARSHIP DISREGARDS SPATIAL PARTICULARITIES

Colonial scholarship disregards spatial particularities. Spatial particularities refers to the mutually informing relationship between land and knowledge generation. Land is not the sole informant of knowledge generation, but an aspect of a holistic system that encompasses “the formations of culture, and the relations of power in which these concepts are located.”¹⁴ The concept of spatial particularities may be best understood in contrast to universality applicability. A disregard for spatial particularities upholds the assumption that Eurocentric epistemologies, ideologies, and theologies have universal applicability. Linklater disrupts the normalization of universal applicability by referring to this colonial structure as a “separate and distinct understanding of the world.”¹⁵ The disregard for spatial particularities, and the notion of universal applicability it informs, enables colonial thought to be divorced from the context “where they originally made sense.”¹⁶ Universal applicability is paramount to the valorization of colonial thought in the landmass currently referred to as the “Americas.” This disregard of spatiality further culminates in the notion that “the world does not matter.”¹⁷

The insignificance of the world is the thesis from which two arguments originate: first, that universality applicability is possible; second, that the Earth can be objectified. While the first argument supports the ideological state apparatuses of the settler-colonial project, the second supports the project’s extractive endeavors. The result is an anthropocentric worldview where “humans hold a position of superiority over Earth and its other occupants.”¹⁸ In this worldview, land-based relationality and reciprocity are neglected. One’s spatial particularity is not regarded as a context to be considered in analysis, as the Earth has no agency. In the colonial conception of space, if any relationship between humans and the Earth were to be drawn, it would be one of unilateral imposition. This is to say that settlers may consciously engage the Earth, but the Earth has no agency to engage them. This allows colonial scholarship to simply omit spatial considerations unless they may be mobilized in the retention of power.

CRITIQUE 3: COLONIAL SCHOLARSHIP PROMOTES INDIVIDUALISM

Colonial scholarship promotes individualism. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, this individualism is presented through colonial methodologies that forego holistic research frameworks.¹⁹ Thus, colonial research methodologies fail to consider the relationality between humans, the land, and its other inhabitants.²⁰ The culmination of individuality’s prioritization in scholarship is the rejection of relationality and reciprocity within its analyses.²¹ The omission of relationality in colonial scholarship’s analyses can be understood as an ideological product of the settler property regime.

Patrick Wolfe describes how the process of Indigenous land dispossession was not carried out exclusively by the state, but by individuals encouraged by the settler-

colonial project's property regime.²² Wolfe describes the once landless European settlers as "rabble"²³ who facilitated the "lethal interlude"²⁴ between discovery and the "extinguishment of native title."²⁵ While this illuminates the necessity of Indigenous elimination in European settlement, it further exposes the relationship between violence and the settler property regime. Thus, for the colonial project, individual settlers were agents of the settler-colonial state's construction, who often employed violence to facilitate Indigenous land dispossession.²⁶ The ideological product of this can be denoted as "white possessiveness,"²⁷ which Gareau and Swain argue, poses an "existential problem or difficulty for Indigenous nations/peoples and communities/collectivities."²⁸ Ultimately, the settler property regime and its accompanying white possessiveness posits that individuals are not only able to possess land, but that this possession is a right guaranteed by the settler-colonial state.²⁹

Colonial possessiveness, informed by the promotion of individualism, extends from the privatization of land to representations of Indigeneity. As Gareau writes, "the power of possessiveness is everywhere, informing and deploying a structural racism that permeates everything."³⁰ As previously discussed, the self-assured supremacy of the "Western European identity"³¹ is the metric by which encountered cultures are comparatively measured and hierarchized in colonial scholarship. Audra Simpson expands upon this point by writing that settler scholars have assumed the responsibility of containing cultural difference "into neat, ethnically defined territorial spaces that now needed to be made sense of, ordered, ranked, governed, and possessed."³² Settler scholars maintain a hegemony in the representation of Indigenous peoples. The categorization described by Simpson does not function to simply present racial caricaturizations of Indigenous peoples, but instead as an agent of land dispossession. As settlers have hegemony in the representation of Indigenous peoples, they construct notions of authenticity. Tuck describes how this creates the notion that "portrays contemporary Indigenous generations to be less authentic, less Indigenous than every prior generation in order to ultimately phase out Indigenous claims to land and usher in settler claims to property."³³

CRITIQUE 4: COLONIAL SCHOLARSHIP EMPLOYS THE COLONIAL GAZE

Colonial scholarship often employs the *colonial gaze*. The colonial gaze, or what Abolson describes as "colonial mirrors or comparisons"³⁴ refers to how the settler-colonial state's ideological apparatuses represent Indigenous peoples with the settler identity set as the normative metric of analysis. In colonial scholarship, this comparison is often weaponized to propagate notions of Indigenous inferiority. Through the colonial gaze, Indigenous peoples are subjected to analysis under the colonial structures that have facilitated their dispossession, such as a linear conception of time, a disregard for spatial particularities, and the promotion of individualism. These fundamental settler-colonial ideological and epistemic positions are antithetical to many Indigenous knowledges and lifeways. Resultantly, the analyses drawn are those of nonadherence.

As Coultard writes, "there is nothing 'inherent' about the perceived 'inferiority' attributed to colonized subjects by the dominant society, nor is there anything 'natural' about the so-called 'complexes' they suffer as a result. Both are the product of colonial social relations: 'If there is a flaw, it lies not in the 'soul' of the [colonized] individual, but in his environment.'"³⁵

The representation and recognition of Indigenous peoples is paramount to the settler-colonial project. A strategy of settler-colonial nation building is the retention of symbolic elements of Indigeneity to articulate its difference and independence.³⁶ Patrick Wolfe provides the example of Australia's progressive government attaching Indigenous symbolism to its public buildings and national airlines.³⁷ For Wolfe, the ideological motivation behind these ostensibly dialectical presentations is rooted in the settler-colonial project's underlying justification.³⁸ In the case of Australia, the justification for settler-colonialism was that the project would better utilize the land.³⁹ It is logical then that Indigenous motifs may become entangled with commercial enterprise within the nation. Thus, representations of Indigenous peoples can range from blatantly racist depictions, to the "progressive" incorporation of symbolism. This demonstrates how "the native repressed continues to structure settler-colonial society"⁴⁰ in controlled ways entirely beneficial to the latter. Settler intuitions maintain a hegemony in Indigenous representation, and resultantly evokes it in strategic nation-building efforts. This is enacted both to articulate difference and to assert dominance through the fruits of the settler-colonial project. These presentations do not demand genuine engagement with Indigenous peoples.

Often, the colonial gaze is purposely superficial to assert the superiority of the settler-colonial project. Real engagement with Indigenous peoples, their epistemologies, ideologies, would demand an undoing of the self-legitimation the settler-colonial project has exerted through its ideological state apparatuses. What if settler-colonial scholarship were to take seriously the notion that spatial particularities matter, or that the passage of time does not intrinsically suppose linear progression? Resultantly, the ideologies of which Indigenous land dispossession is dependent upon would begin to unravel. In the words of Audra Simpson, "knowing and representing people within those places required more than military might."⁴¹ For this reason, the settler-colonial project's ideological state apparatuses, such as its academy, are cautious in their engagement and representation of Indigenous peoples. This illuminates the often reductionist and essentialist presentations of Indigenous peoples present in colonial scholarship. These ideological and epistemic positions must be continuously evoked in colonial scholarship to maintain the settler-colonial project. They are not just constructive to just what the individual settler believes to be true, but to the maintenance of land dispossession.

CONCLUSION

It is pertinent that considerations of the settler-colonialism project critically examine the ideological state apparatus and its production of colonial scholarship. As Patrick Wolfe succinctly writes, settler-colonialism "is a structure

not an event."⁴² The ideological positions of a linear conception of time, a disregard for spatial particularities, the promotion of individualism, and the colonial gaze, are all appendages of the settler-colonial structure. The danger of these ideologies is their naturalisation that renders their presentation innocuous. It is challenging to understand the relationship between a linear conception of time and structure of settler-colonialism without understanding how this ideological position legitimates and advances Indigenous land dispossession. As Simpson posits, the settler colonial project is not solely sustained by "military might."⁴³ It is vital that scholarship is treated as a potential weapon of colonial expansion and legitimation.

NOTES

1. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 1–40.
2. Jojola, "Toward a Cyclical Model of Indigenous History."
3. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 62.
4. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 62.
5. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 72.
6. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 68.
7. Jojola, "Toward a Cyclical Model of Indigenous History," 6.
8. Fanon, "On National Culture," 210.
9. Fanon, "On National Culture," 210.
10. Fanon, "On National Culture," 209.
11. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 62.
12. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 62.
13. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 389.
14. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 48.
15. Linklater, "A Discussion on Traditional Tribal Religious Philosophical Beliefs."
16. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 65.
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18. Cordova, "Time, Culture, and the Self."
19. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 55.
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22. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 393.
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27. Gareau and Swain, "Indigenous Knowledges."
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29. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 24.
30. Gareau and Swain, "Indigenous Knowledges."
31. Deloria Jr., *God Is Red*, 62.
32. Simpson, "Ethnographic Refusal," 97.
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34. Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*, 261.
35. Coulthard, "The Plunge into the Chasm of the Past," 48.
36. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 389.
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Local Time: A Placed-Based Account of Time in Vine Deloria Jr.'s Various Works

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INTRODUCTION

Recent work elaborating on the longstanding effects of settler colonialism have diagnosed the function of time in justifying and perpetuating coloniality. In particular, it is helpful to consider Kevin Bruyneel and Mark Rifkin, whose recent works outline how time has been used throughout US political history to designate indigenous peoples as underdeveloped. By doing so, settlers seek to justify genocidal policies that civilize the "savage Indian" and further ensconce the "right" view of history and progress.¹ Where theorists have adeptly outlined the weaponization of temporality under Western coloniality, they have yet to offer a particular account of time that favors indigenous resistance.

With the aforementioned political discussions orienting my approach, I turn to Vine Deloria Jr.'s (Lakota) writings on time and place to formulate what a place-based account of time entails.² I begin with Deloria's critique of Western Christianity in *God Is Red*, where he first introduces the implications and limitations of a strictly temporal worldview. Following this distinction, using Deloria's later texts, I construct a spatial account of time as grounded within a particular location, structured in communal relationships, and cyclical in arrangement. I term this place-based temporality *local time*.³

CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY AS A TEMPORAL RELIGION

Before defining *local time*, it is necessary to distinguish how Western Christianity maintains a temporal worldview. In effect, by emphasizing time, Western Christianity neglects to recognize the centrality of place in non-Western societies and ultimately facilitates colonial expansion. Furthermore, even when not seen as originating from a particular culture or religion, time continues to function

as a metric to organize all experiences within a linear time and telos. To paint this picture, I look at *God Is Red* where Deloria first makes his distinction between temporal and spatial religions.⁴

Deloria diagnoses that there is a metaphysical difference in how particular peoples view space and time; where American Indians hold place as sacred and central to cultural practice, Deloria claims that "immigrants [Western Europeans] review the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences."⁵ Because of this, Western Europeans come to see "history—time—in the best possible light."⁶ Deloria claims that this difference reflects the distinct religious frameworks which Western-Europeans and indigenous peoples carry into their cultural and political beliefs; namely, the significance of place, or lack of, in religious practice. Distinguishing two broad categories of religion in "Thinking in Time and Space," he describes that the Western European identity is formed from a religion which champions temporality and diminishes the role of place. Meanwhile, indigenous religions are more centrally organized around place.

At its core, Deloria claims that Western Europeans assume a temporal worldview in which time proceeds linearly between an origin and towards an eventual end point.⁷ Where linearity merely describes the structure, he reinforces that by assuming that time is linear. Western European Christians also believe themselves as the inheritors of a divine plot which demands colonizing others to secure their eventual destiny.⁸ This destiny not only provides structure and a narrative for imperialism but it also conscripts the entire globe within the destiny of a particular people.⁹ Time, despite being organized around a select few, needs to either eliminate or include others within its progress narrative.¹⁰ Deloria argues that every aspect of society and culture, even political and economic events, can be conscripted under linear time to ensure the stability of the Western telos and past. In this regard, Western Europeans act as the central players in progress and history, organizing those they encounter within this overarching narrative. For instance, those termed "savage" or "uncivilized," are located somewhere on the timeline of progress but occupy a particular period of European development which the West has moved past. Hence, Western Christian temporality organizes others within its story and creates social and racial hierarchies using its own metrics of linear progress.

Where colonialism in the Americas was founded on a religious narrative, Deloria argues that, over time, the Christian component of Western temporality became secularized through history and science. By globalizing its own narrative of progress, Western Christianity became the metric for organizing temporal experiences and interactions with the world while appearing as universal and objective. In "Do We Need a Beginning?" Deloria argues that Western science accepts "Time as real and linear," deriving this concept directly from Christianity.¹¹ While he attaches time directly to science in other works, here he remarks on how philosophers carry religious assumptions about time into early discussions of scientific observations.

Therefore, we see the world through a “uniformitarian, homogeneous passage of time.”¹² In doing so, “that appropriation [of time] now forces us to link everything in one grand temporal scenario in which life struggles from single-celled creatures to the complexity we find today.”¹³ In other words, Deloria argues that Christian linear time persists in the Western perception of scientific progress and development. Science, although adopting the secular language of incremental change, does not unseat the religious belief that time is linear. Instead, it further cements it as a universal metaphysical concept.¹⁴

In addition to concealing the linear perception of time within science, the new secular temporal framing had to repurpose the established “truths” of Christian creation and destiny. Deloria writes, “to dethrone god as the originator of life and substitute ‘mother nature’ or ‘blind chance,’ as science has done, is simply to remain within the original framework of inquiry.”¹⁵ Science substitutes the Christian creator and myth of progress with evolutionary chance and explains linear progression through constant incremental change.¹⁶ In either the religious or secular description, linear time and progress are maintained, whether that be through rejoining a divine being in the afterlife or becoming a more fit creature for our environment.

In its secular appearance, linear time has universalized itself and obscured its cultural and religious origins, yet it still continues to serve a distinct purpose in facilitating colonialism. Where Christianity offered religious motivation for colonizing others through conversion, science instead uses reason to spread its knowledge across any place and time. Deloria writes,

Without “a spatial point of view” time and history can be globalized and universalized. The particular needs, values, and history of a particular place can be universalized over all places through the coloniality of power. Particular needs, values, and knowledge can be universalized across time and space and forced onto people of other places at any time.¹⁷

In effect, by establishing an abstract concept of time that explains social origins, an eventual goal, and the mechanism of change, Western Christian linear time universalizes its perspective beyond its spatial origin. Furthermore, it now applies itself indiscriminately to places and peoples by appealing to universal reason. In other words, a temporal account of reality reflects how “time and history have been abstracted into something universal,” and, as I will show in the next step of this overview, in our relation to time, we neglect to see how fundamental place is in our experience of reality.¹⁸

PLACEHOOD AND SACRED PLACES

If history operates as an extension of linear time, effectively separating people from the land and diminishing a spatial perspective, is an indigenous account of history and temporality possible? I argue that a spatial account of time is possible, and that we can define its key features by tracing Deloria’s discussions of time and place in his other texts. Following his critique of Western Christian temporality

in “Thinking in Time and Space,” Deloria does not offer an explicit indigenous account of time. So, to make this claim, I highlight how indigenous culture/religion opposes Western Christian temporality by grounding experience within a spatial perspective. By linking together several of Deloria’s discussions of place, I develop a non-linear sense of time and history which I term *local time* to stress its origins in placehood. In the following section I highlight a fundamental feature of *local time*: placehood.

In contrast to Christian Western Europeans, who see time as fundamental, Deloria defines American Indian religions as spatial, meaning they require a connection to particular places for cultural practices.¹⁹ Place, as I will define in this paper, is more than a space in which we are located; it also denotes the experiences and the relations that we have in that location, whether that be with other humans, the land itself, or a more-than-human community.²⁰ We can see the connection to place most clearly in Deloria’s discussions of sacred places which highlight the epistemic and ethical role that sacred places reveal.

To understand how time functions in a spatial account, I investigate how spaces become sacred and inform one’s relation to the land. Following this, I draw out the temporal elements that sacred places entail. Deloria references this relationship in his remarks on the difference of revelation in temporal and spatial religions. In comparison to the universal message and experience offered in temporal religions, “revelation [in a spatial religion] was seen as a continuous process of adjustment to the natural surroundings and not as a specific message valid for all times and places.”²¹ Insofar as religious practice and revelations are tied to a particular place, then we must look at the processes that make places sacred. In “Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility,” Deloria remarks on four senses in which a place can be understood as sacred. By demonstrating how places are understood or made sacred, Deloria articulates how indigenous spirituality survives today and is capable of producing new sacred locations.²²

Deloria’s first two senses of the sacred refer primarily to human experiences in a particular place which hold significance to a community. In the first sense of the sacred, he defines that a place is sacred in order to honor the immense human effort which took place there.²³ In the second sense of the sacred, a place is made sacred because an experience lives on in community memory.²⁴ Not dissimilar to the first sense, this is referring to events which are necessary to share with the community for moral education. In other words, the sacred place must be remembered to remember the lesson.

Following these two senses of the sacred, Deloria articulates a third sense in which an “overwhelming holiness where the Higher Powers, on their own initiative, have revealed Themselves to human beings.”²⁵ In this case, the creator makes themselves apparent and bestows sacredness on a location, making it a site for spiritual practice.²⁶ The creator establishes our experiences and allows us to engage in relations with other beings, which, in this case, we come to realize on sacred land.²⁷ In the third sense, sacred places guide human activity by providing the means of

accessing moral guidance through our direct interactions with that place. Place is made an active participant in our moral education and, therefore, is seen as a teacher. In summary, across the first three descriptions of the sacred, a place is not inert land; instead, it is an active agent within the indigenous community. Land actively conditions our experiences and plays an epistemic role, which allows us to remember communal experiences and learn moral lessons.

Deloria offers a final sense in which things can be seen as sacred. Insofar as there are higher powers in nature that remain involved with human beings, there is potential for new sacred locations to be produced. If sacred places can appear and be created in any of the three senses, we have to consider the potential for future sacred places in how we orient ourselves toward land and the world around us. Deloria urges, "people must always be ready to experience new revelations at a new location. If this possibility did not exist, all deities and spirits would be dead."²⁸ And "consequently, we always look forward to the revelation of new sacred places and ceremonies."²⁹ Deloria argues that this makes us responsible for the earth in consideration of future sacred sites and the experiences which could create them.³⁰ It is important to emphasize here that indigenous spatial practice is not located in the past. Instead, it is made active through the first three descriptions and futural in this fourth sense. The possibility for a place to be sacred extends our understanding of sacred places to include existing sacred places in addition to all places as *potentially* sacred. To the effect that all places are potentially sacred, all land and place is fundamental for spiritual practice and must be preserved for this sake.³¹

To draw out the temporal elements in placehood and sacred places, I want to consider how Deloria's descriptions structure a relationship between past, present, and future. So far, through the writings I've chosen, we have come to realize land as the connection between the past and present. As Deloria remarks, across the first three instances of sacredness, human activity and divine presence can occur in the past. However, despite having occurred in the past, these experiences are not inaccessible or unfelt in the present.³² By accessing sacred places and engaging with the land, these occurrences and teachings are made present and available to our community today. Furthermore, in the case of future sacred places, if everything has the potential to be sacred, then it must be treated as sacred in the current moment to preserve this potential for future generations.

I interpret placehood this way to subvert the linear notion of past and future which we encountered in Christian linear time. As discussed earlier, Christian temporality maintains a linear timeline of events, which also points to an eventual purpose/destiny. We are located somewhere along this line in the present moment and are limited in our relationship to the past. In contrast to this, a spatial account of time allows us to actively engage with the past and future via our activity with the land. The past can exist in a spatial account of time, but sacredness allows us to bind it to a particular place and make it manifest in the present. Thus, by rooting time in place, we are always actively situated within the past and future since these are physical locations in space.

Additionally, by making places sacred, it emphasizes the active epistemic and moral role that placehood plays in community.³³ Likewise, if something can occur in the future and make a place sacred, it is also sacred to us today. Through activity with the land, the past and future collapse into the present moment where indigenous peoples always find themselves in an active relationship with earlier and later generations.

Before moving further, I want to clarify that I do not think a place-based account of time indicates an ongoing presentness. I think the concepts of past, present, and future, borrowed from Christian linear temporality, are unable to grasp the relational aspects of indigenous cultures and place-based time. Relationships in these accounts are never limited only by time; instead, they draw attention to how one is influenced by and influences others. Events can occur and their influence might not be fully realized, yet this does not limit how and in what way events influence communal memory and activity. Hence, to break down how space gives way to an alternative view of time, we have to better understand how indigenous peoples think of relationships with other beings beyond sacred places where land is fundamental to recognizing communal relations.

POWER AND PLACE: A COMMUNITY OF RELATIONS

In this section, I develop a second sense of *local time*. Using Vine Deloria Jr.'s and Daniel Wildcat's (Yuchi, Muscogee) discussions in *Power and Place*, I articulate how communal relations contribute to a sense of time that is based in place. Already, we have seen how a spatial perspective uses land to ground its sense of time in a particular place and location; I build from this account of space to demonstrate how place is more than geography—it also denotes a particular arrangement of communal relationships. Insofar as relationships influence and inform our positions in the world, we inherit responsibilities to others as they inherit responsibilities to us.³⁴ Hence, the value that we hold in place is oriented towards the betterment of the community.

In *Power and Place*, Deloria and Wildcat claim that, in order to understand our experiences, we have to reflect on them as a product of complex relationships with the world.³⁵ This means that, at the metaphysical level, all entities are capable of engaging with and influencing one another. Everything is fundamentally related in some way, so we, as part of this network, can understand the world by unpacking our experiences within it. Thus, to understand our experiences, Deloria and Wildcat introduce two concepts: power and place. Power and place allow us to make sense of who we are, how we are connected to others, and in what way these relationships influence us. They define "power [as] the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe," and "place [as] the relationship of things to each other."³⁶ While still somewhat unclear in its ethical significance, Deloria and Wildcat argue that power and place can be best articulated when placed into "a simple equation: power and place produce personality."³⁷ Power + Place = Personality, sometimes written as the P3 formula, is used to understand

how one produces a particular personality, or experience of the world, when understood in relation to others.

To clarify further, Deloria and Wildcat expound that power is the living energy that exists throughout every being and in the universe. Power is not exclusive to humans. Rather, every entity contains some element of power. Power is not something to be realized in the abstract or quantifiable; instead, Deloria and Wildcat describe that it is felt and learned through engaging with other beings. Only after being alongside others can we realize how their influence shapes our capacities for action. They continue, "in ordinary language we can call power amorphous, for it takes many forms, some overt and some latent. We are conscious of the former, while the latter lie dormant and have an existence of (to) which we are not initially conscious."³⁸ Power then is something that we can observe but that may not be perceivable in all situations. If power appears to us personally, then our relationship to power is limited by our epistemic capacity to understand who we are in relation with and how their influence matters. How power appears to us in one scenario might be obscured or hidden in another; thus, realizing one's power is an ongoing process.

Following their definition of power, Deloria and Wildcat argue that because it is amorphous and can only be understood through our experiences, we must inspect our relationships with others. Yet, building from our earlier sense of place as geographical, they define place as locating one within a community of relations and processes. Deloria and Wildcat write that "place or space is concrete and palpable."³⁹ Hence, we can understand a sense of place as similar to how we are always located in a particular geographical sense of place. They continue, "Place is not merely the relationship of things, resources, or objects, it is the site where dynamic processes of interaction occur—where processes between living beings or other-than-human persons occur."⁴⁰ Where place refers to a physical location in Deloria's account of sacred places, we have an additional sense of the term as denoting a metaphysical location as well. Namely, place refers to the site where processes and interactions with other things occur.

As we understand Deloria and Wildcat's account so far, place refers to more than mere geography; it includes how one is situated within a relationship with other beings. They explain, "the point should be obvious: we, human beings . . . are intimately connected and related to, in fact dependent on, the other living beings, land, air, and water of the earth's biosphere."⁴¹ That is, where we might consider our relations with other people, Deloria and Wildcat argue for a broad concept of others to include non-human entities as well. Our relatedness means that we are "inextricably bound up with the existence and welfare of the other living beings and places of the earth: beings and places, understood as persons possessing power."⁴² Places are persons who possess power. Thus, others have the potential to influence us and be influenced by us. Not only are we related, but the well-being of others also becomes necessary for us to pursue. Hence, our well-being is mutually upheld within our relationship; what matters for others must also matter for us.

With this articulation of place as relational and spatial, I transition here to discuss how this produces the communal aspect in *local time*. As discussed in the previous section, if we consider how placehood makes events in time located in a particular place, then we must also consider in what ways place implicates our relations as immanent in time. I argue this move is similar to how I discussed the futural aspect of sacred places.⁴³ If we understand our relations as structuring what things matter, then the existence of others in the past, current, and future demand consideration in determining what experiences matter now. The things that matter to our community of relations also matter whether they are located in the past or the future.

By broadening our community to include those who have existed and will exist, then we must consider what is needed to sustain their well-being. For indigenous peoples, the family is thought of as "a multigenerational complex of people, and clan and kinship responsibilities extended beyond the grave and far into the future."⁴⁴ With this inter-generational family in mind, our responsibility for maintaining their well-being is also implicated across time. For instance, "remembering a distant ancestor's name and achievements might be equally as important as feeding a visiting cousin or showing a niece how to sew and cook."⁴⁵ As mentioned here, one's community is multigenerational in scope. The influence that those ancestors maintain is still meaningful, not unlike those we maintain with our current relations. We are still responsible for them, just as they were responsible for us. The distance across generations is not limited to those we directly engage with but includes those who came before us and those who will outlive us. Nonetheless, they are relatives and kin to whom we hold responsibilities because we share influence and connection.

Our relations with the non-human world also implicate generations across time. As mentioned earlier, water is a being that possesses power and influences us. We, in turn, also influence water. We are equally implicated in its well-being because, without it, we would not survive. Further, plant life and animals that partake of the water are implicated in our relationship with water. Being responsible and in relation to water requires us to be cognizant of how its well-being is implicated in our relationship to present and future generations. What would have happened to us if our ancestors failed to protect and respect their relationship to the water? What will happen to the generations of people and non-humans that must also thrive from that same source of water?⁴⁶

Place is central for linking us across generations and informs how we ought to engage with each other in community. By orienting time from within a space, we are implicated with those we are in relation with through various responsibilities. I argue that this communal aspect is the second component of *local time*. Time, by being dependent on place, includes a community of others. The well-being of others is inextricably tied to our own well-being. More than a simple community, we are made in kinship. Thus, when one is responsible for others across time, those relationships are equally meaningful to the relations we hold in the present.

When time is made communal through a sense of place, it considers past and future relationships. However, this is not to say that indigenous cultures also maintain a sense of linear progress or teleology. Deloria, addressing this point, distinguishes the telos in linear time from the concern we share about future generations. Christian linear temporality includes a developing view of progress that spans across places towards its destiny—*local time* and a sense of place are concerned with the present reality and the practice of community values at this moment. Deloria clarifies that “there is little dependence on the concept of progress either on an individual or community basis as a means of evaluating the impact of religious practices. Value judgments involve present community realities and not a reliance on part of the future.”⁴⁷ In other words, there is a difference in how the future factors into a spatial account versus a linear account of time. Acting in deference to others begins with a community that transcends a single generation, so the observance of these community values is always present. The eventual end of linear time requires a concept of progress that moves society from the past into the future. Hence, it is in consideration of this eventual future that current behavior or religious practice is affirmed or rejected. Because indigenous people actively engage with the land, and their behavior is organized by a community of relations, there is no consideration of an eventual end. Rather, relations are organized with respect to those who came before and those who will come after. Thus, *local time* understands place as more than geographical; place denotes one’s particular community and the values which inform and direct one’s activity with land.

PERSONALITY AND CYCLICALITY

Across the previous sections, I defined the role that place fulfills within indigenous communities and elaborated on how placehood entails particular community relationships and activity. In this section, I will explain and develop the third and final characteristic of *local time*: cyclicity.⁴⁸ *Local time’s* cyclical quality is articulated through the method by which we come to understand our relations with others. While this is not necessarily cyclical, the process by which we learn about others requires our maintenance of conditions which foster community well-being. This requires an understanding of the depth of relations and a responsibility to produce what Deloria and Wildcat term *personality*. Whereas personality broadly refers to our experience with the world as conditioned by others, this is not a product of a single process. Rather, it is an ongoing reflective experience enabled by one’s engagement with others. Hence, building from how place implicates us within a community across time, our process of engaging with that community reveals the cycles of what is necessary to create personality.

In continuation with Deloria and Wildcat’s discussion of power and place, I explicate personality as a product of the P3 formula and a process that describes our understanding of a sense of place.⁴⁹ Before getting into particular descriptions of personality, Wildcat offers one interpretation. He writes,

I understand Deloria’s idea of personality as the substantive embodiment, the unique realization,

of all the relations and power we embody. Because each of us is someplace and, but for a few exceptions, never in exactly the same place as anybody else, our personalities are unique. Our phenomenal existence entails a spatial dimension and variations in power relations with other persons in the world. Therefore, *personality* as Deloria uses the term is a metaphysical concept, fundamentally different from the popular science view that what and who we are can be reduced to genetics or biochemical mechanisms.⁵⁰

Working from Wildcat’s interpretation, we can articulate how personality operates as more than a “particular experience of reality.”⁵¹ Wildcat describes that we are to understand each thing as organized according to its position, its capacity to influence, and how it realizes this power. Personalities are the sum of these two factors. To recognize our own personality, one needs to reflect on the power they have and how they are positioned within relations. Personality encapsulates the total of what it means to be placed within a community.

To better understand personality and, in particular, how we come to learn the personality of others, I defer to some of the examples that Deloria and Wildcat examine. They write that personalities can be “understood by anyone who has had the long-term friendship of a dog, cat, bird, or ‘individual’ of another species.”⁵² In this case, personality is not an abstract concept, but it requires personal engagement to understand. By being in contact and forming friendships, we form an understanding of pets as distinct personalities. That is, “we (each of us having such a friendship) know our other-than-human person is an individual, different from others of the same kind or breed. Why? Because we know them as persons: we learn through experience their personality.”⁵³ Therefore, we come to learn the personality of that individual by growing to understand their relation to us and their distinct influence on other beings. Those with personalities are distinct individuals to whom we hold particular relationships. Additionally, personality is something that is easily recognized over time and through experiences.

In summary, personality can only be learned through our relationships with other beings, and it is by this process that we come to see them as people with unique personalities. Hence, personality is the result of comprehending the power of others and how they are placed. However, insofar as we are limited in our understanding of others based on the way we relate to them, realizing personalities is a constant effort. Likewise, because we are entities with power and placed in community with others, then the personalities of others are always being developed through our experiences with them.

To clarify this point, consider water. Water possesses a unique personality which can be understood by seeing where it is placed and how one is related to it. I can look out of my window right now and see Lake Michigan. It is cold and windy, so there are waves which sway against the snow-covered rocks. I know this is typical for the season, although I remember instances where it is extremely still

and quiet. The water was also warm in the summer, even though it is cold now. Further, I am familiar with Lake Michigan, but I am hesitant to claim we are friends despite my geographical proximity. I can infer a personality from it, but I also imagine how my understanding of its personality might change if I were a fisherman on the pier, a frequent swimmer, or sitting in the sand. In this way, my method of relating to the lake also alters my perception and understanding of its personality. All the while, I drink the water from this immense being and recognize how it shapes the culture and city adjacent to it. I recognize its power but only insofar as I reflect on its capacity to influence me and, in turn, my ability to influence it. Similar to my relationship with particular family members, we are kin, but sometimes after thinking through how well I know them, I come to realize how shallow my impression is. Being relatives and kin does not mean we have immediate knowledge of another person; however, this relation does mean I have the capacity to learn via my personal experience. Perhaps, if I engaged with them more frequently, I could gain a better sense of their personality. Personalities are constantly in flux and informed by one's experience, so to gather an understanding of personality I must first be in contact with an other.

In addition to outlining personality and the process of understanding it, Deloria and Wildcat argue that there is an ethical imperative to help realize personality and preserve one's sense of individuality. They write, "completing the relationship focuses the individual's attention on the results of his or her actions. Thus, the Indian people are concerned about the products of what they did, and they sought to anticipate and consider all the effects of their actions."⁵⁴ By recognizing the personality of another, we are obligated to realize our actions as always having an effect, and thus we must consider how we influence others regardless of them being past, current, or future persons.⁵⁵ Having a relationship with another being is one aspect of knowing personality, but with this knowledge, one inherits the obligation to complete this relationship and anticipate in what way our actions affect others.

Building from this conversation on personality, I want to draw out how this allows for a cyclical experience of time. To understand this temporal element, it's helpful to consider how indigenous peoples come to know and experience their relationship to the world and various beings. For instance, in experiences with plant relatives, some peoples developed planting systems that reveal time as cyclical. Deloria and Wildcat write, "plants, because they have their own life cycles, taught Indians about time."⁵⁶ Working with the land and entities in the world demonstrates how certain beings experience time in different cycles. Furthermore, they continue, "this knowledge about corn and the manner in which its growth cycle correlated with that of the plants of the mountains some 500 miles away was very sophisticated and involved the idea of time as something more complex than mere chronology. Time was also growth of all things toward maturity."⁵⁷ To reiterate, experience with the world shows that time is not a measurement; rather, it can be better understood as the cycles and processes of beings working towards maturity. Since personality acts as a form of experiential knowledge and understanding of what one

requires, it plays a central role in knowing what one requires to mature throughout their distinct cycle. Thus, by learning how something comes to maturity, we understand time as recurring processes, patterns, and experiences with others, not as a simple chronology of events.⁵⁸

By encouraging a personal engagement with the world, Deloria and Wildcat claim that an indigenous account of things "must be personal and incapable of expansion and projection to hold true universally."⁵⁹ What we understand as personality from this process of reflecting on power and place remains a distinct engagement with the world. It can only be the product of one's experience from a particular location. In other words, any knowledge we learn might not be universal.

For us to understand the process of maturity and the sense of time that entities maintain in their cyclicity, Deloria and Wildcat draw attention to how our understanding must be separated from linear teleological time. They claim that a psychologization of how things behave based on our experiences with them is necessary to understand the process of maturation. This is not scientific knowledge but a practice of knowing something and understanding its personality through lived experiences with that being. Deloria and Wildcat write that "being interested in the psychological behavior of things in the world and attributing personality to all things, Indians began to observe and remember how and when things happened together."⁶⁰ Thus, with these experiences, "there was consequently, no firm belief in cause and effect, which plays an important role in Western science and thinking. But Indians were well aware that when a certain sequence of things began certain other elements or events would also occur."⁶¹ In other words, by forgoing cause and effect, we learn of things as persons and develop knowledge via our experiences.

Linear time in religion and science rely on abstract processes in which there is already a predicted or hypothesized outcome. Psychologizing others allows for a variety of outcomes and respects the potential for things to occur otherwise. In comparison to the linear cause and effect, which Deloria and Wildcat reject, there is potential for understanding the world via applying experience through correlation. Additionally, personality and a psychological understanding of correlation forms knowledge through our relations with others and how they interact within a wider community of beings.

The cycles of other beings demonstrate a different process of coming to maturity, which we come to know by learning these personalities. Additionally, uncovering and understanding personality reveals aspects of one's temporality. Because personality requires engaging in one's sense of place, time is necessarily tied to this place and provides the context for the maturation processes to occur. To clarify how cyclicity operates, Deloria writes that time "must be conceived as cyclical in nature, endlessly allowing the repetition of patterns of possibilities."⁶² Hence, time can be understood as cyclical because it requires the reproduction of patterns and possibilities for various processes of maturity. Cyclicity, as Deloria outlines in the earlier quote, denotes what things require for maturation.

Insofar as we learn what others require for maturation by understanding their personalities, we then come to realize time as cyclical. Deloria and Wildcat question that, because things are understood as personalities with respective cycles of maturation, what does this reveal when we consider how time is experienced as cyclical? I argue that the “cyclical patterns of possibilities” act as the template that organizes indigenous accounts of time in opposition to linear time.⁶³

As mentioned, spatial religions are distinct to their respective community, values, and location. Thus, it is limited by its geography and reference one’s particular sense of place and community. Insofar as we are engaged with the cycles of others and their processes of maturation, we are necessarily bound into their cyclicity of experiencing and organizing time. Similarly, because we maintain a cycle distinct to our own maturing personalities, others are also bound into our sense of time.

If time is cyclical and bound to particular places and communities, we must also realize that it cannot be generalized across locations. Deloria remarks,

Space has limitations that are primarily geographical, and any sense of time arising within the religious experience becomes secondary to present geographical existence. The hazard that appears within the spatial conceptions of religion is the effect that missionary activity has on its integrity when it tries to leave its homeland. Can it leave the land of its nativity and embark on a program of world or continental conquest without losing its religious essence in favor of purely political or economic considerations? Are ceremonies restricted to particular places, and do they become useless in a foreign land?⁶⁴

Deloria articulates that space possesses some limitations when we consider the importance of place for spiritual practice. The necessity for particular places limits the proselytization of spatial religions, further emphasizing the centrality of place, and implicates our engagement with people and time as spatially tied. One place cannot be substituted for another. While proselytizing is not a concern for most indigenous practices, this implies that time is always particular to a place and cannot be abstracted away from it.⁶⁵

IS THERE INDIGENOUS HISTORY?

By establishing an understanding of *local time*, which centers our relations to land, I want to clarify whether it can produce an account of history. Deloria has articulated the effect of linear time and how it has become the method of obscuring placehood and narrowing the focus of history towards the development of a particular culture and race. Can there be a history that avoids this abstraction and still honors spatiality? Is *local time* sufficient for creating an account of indigenous history? I argue that *local time* can produce a corresponding sense of history insofar as it holds place as central to the experience and remembrance of events.

Returning to the text, Deloria argues that a spatial account of history is possible given that it remains rooted in its place of occurrence and cannot be abstracted away from space. Recall how linear temporality enabled the abstraction and delocalization of people and time from the land. If we subvert this process and consider history and experiences that have occurred in relation to a particular place, then we can produce a record of time in the land on which it occurred. We need to rethink history as spatial by viewing change as place-dependent and localized to a particular community and set of relations. Thus, a spatial account of history is possible insofar as it remains tied to the place in which it occurred. If we oppose the abstract notion of change which linear time argues for, as Deloria suggests, change can be maintained and explained through one’s relationship with others as described in that place.

I want to develop this one step further. As Deloria and Wildcat describe, everyone maintains a distinct sense of place, and, because no place is situated the same, we have to conclude that the history of places is multiplicitous. Thus, the question of whether there can be an indigenous account of history misunderstands and generalizes a linear sense of history as univocal. Places are always unique and, thus, there are multiple histories which one can engage with through the land.

With this possibility of multiple histories, I want to reiterate and clarify that history itself is not the problem; it is how linear time devalues land and eventually abstracts away from it that is the key issue. Time as an abstract concept is delinked from the land. In its current condition, Western temporality and religion “like to believe that the histories created by Western science and religions are the proper way to understand the world.”⁶⁶ Temporality feigns control over the entities it encounters and becomes detached from the context in which it is founded. Most of all, as Deloria states, this aspect of control makes us “no longer in awe of anything except [our]selves.”⁶⁷ Despite this, there is hope when we consider *local time* as reconnecting us to the land and centering our history around the spatial and relational context where time is located.

CONCLUSION

By working through several of Vine Deloria Jr.’s texts, I constructed *local time* to emphasize the core features of an indigenous spatial perspective. To articulate my account of *local time*, I first recounted Deloria’s critique of Christian linear time. After establishing how Christian linear time became secular and enabled the abstraction of time from a sense of place, I then introduced the first characteristic of *local time*, place. The importance of land and place, as established through Deloria’s account of sacred places, articulates that time is directly tied to a location and cannot be separated from it. Time, as located in space, allows us to access various points in time through activity with the land instructed by our community. As a result, time is communal. By being communal, we have to listen and recreate the conditions to sustain our community well-being. This requires us to learn and reproduce the conditions necessary to allow for each community member’s cycles of maturity. Thus, *local time* is cyclical in arrangement.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate a point included by Deloria and Wildcat in *Power and Place*. Members of marginalized groups often discuss our experiences, our cultural knowledge, and our beliefs as separate from the world of Western knowledge. Still, it is important to realize that, while a particular conception of time is culturally derived, we do not necessarily have to be raised in indigenous cultures to understand and adopt a more robust sense of space. Especially in light of the environmental destruction and extractive practices that the West has developed, these lessons are even more necessary for us all. Deloria and Wildcat warn that “we American Indians have done ourselves a great disservice by speaking of ‘living in two worlds.’”⁶⁸ Indigenous accounts, in realizing our relationality to the natural world, also emphasize the relationality between us as members of the greater community. Thus, understanding ourselves as members of separate worlds betrays the experience of existing within a shared reality with shared problems and solutions.

Embracing our relations also means embracing our capacity to change our behavior and engage with our neglected relations. Having introduced *local time* as a spatial account of time, I argue that we can learn to engage with our place-based existence and realize our obligations to the world and others around us. We must consider life and time as different from linear progression and delocalized time.

NOTES

1. Mark Rifkin and Kevin Bruyneel discuss the implications of adopting settler-time at the institutional level. Rifkin articulates this account in *Beyond Settler Time* to show how settler-time acts as an organizing principle in the experience of indigenous peoples. Kevin Bruyneel’s *The Third Space of Sovereignty* also articulates the effects of placing indigenous people “in the past” or “pre-history” within US legal interpretation to extend plenary power over sovereign indigenous nations.
2. In this paper, I often slip between using the term space, place, land or placehood to denote the spatial aspect and emphasis that my sources and I argue for. In any case, they refer to the same spatial and locational component that I elaborate on throughout.
3. It is worth noting that, while Deloria himself didn’t positively identify and define place-based time across his work, I piece together what one might look like.
4. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 61–76. I also include brief exegesis from *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths* to substantiate the claim that linear temporality is still contained even in secular discussions of time. Towards the end of this section, I include a secondary source to inspect how a temporal lens devalues the role of space in our relationship to the world.
5. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 61–62.
6. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 61–62. While Deloria mentions here that Western society is founded on a sense of temporality, it still maintains a sense of place, though diminished. For the sake of brevity, I will not be discussing this in entirety, but I acknowledge that space and time are still connected and somewhat fundamental even in the Western temporal culture. Also, I want to make a quick note on terminology; throughout this paper, I use the terms “Indian,” “American Indian,” or “Indigenous,” for different reasons. “Indian” or “American Indian” are highly contentious terms, however Deloria’s usage of it often reflects the specific context of this identity within US colonial and legal history. Often times when pulling from Deloria’s texts I reiterate his descriptions of indigenous peoples as American Indians for the sake of continuity. Other times, I use “indigenous” to highlight the context which informs a particular indigenous identity. Where the tribal affiliation of concepts or individuals are known I will then use each groups preferred identification.
7. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 62.
8. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 62.
9. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 62.
10. Deloria “Thinking in Time and Space,” 67–68.
11. Deloria, “Do We Need a Beginning?” in *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths*, 15. Emphasis in original text.
12. Deloria, “Do We Need a Beginning?” 15.
13. Deloria, “The Nature of ‘Religion,’” 131.
14. Deloria has more writings on evolution, but I will only gloss these when relevant in this argument.
15. Deloria., “Do We Need a Beginning?” 14.
16. I think this is sufficient to acknowledge the preservation of religious temporality into Western culture, although it is very superficial. Deloria criticizes science and evolution in several works, however I understand that this is generally to criticize how it serves to systematize and exhaust all meaning into one “secular” metric.
17. Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land*, 24. Brian Burkhart’s work was key in piecing together this paper given that he expands on spatial-temporal distinction in Deloria’s work and articulates the epistemic function of land/place in ethics.
18. Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land*, 24.
19. Deloria, *Thinking in Time and Space*, 61–62.
20. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 66.
21. Deloria, “Thinking in Time and Space,” 66.
22. Deloria, “Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility,” *God Is Red*, 271–86. For the sake of brevity, although introducing the first two descriptions of sacredness that Deloria offers in his text, I only analyze the last two since these most effectively reflect the relationship between place and temporality. It is worth noting that Deloria writes this particular article to make indigenous accounts of sacredness legible to non-indigenous audiences. At times, he makes some anthropocentric and overly general statements on the connection between sacred sites and land. I try my best to clarify that sacredness is inherent to land/non-human entities and is not always derivative of human activity.
23. An example that Deloria offers here is the battle of Gettysburg. This battlefield is land reserved in remembrance of the lives lost.
24. Deloria, “Sacred Places,” 275–77.
25. Deloria, “Sacred Places,” 278–79.
26. It is important to note that, while Deloria denotes a presence of “Higher Powers,” most indigenous religions hold things sacred because their existence is owed to a creator—how this is defined is more particular to each culture.
27. Although alluding to a Creator can seem like it appeals to the same concept of a creator/god that Christian religions also believe, the creator for some indigenous cultures refers to the world both as a being and an organization of beings. What is important to center and preserve in this idea of a Creator is the presence of a personality. I speak more on this term in later sections of this paper, but it mainly encourages us to have a personal relationship to the world not as an inert object but as a living person to which we hold responsibilities and obligations towards.
28. Deloria, “Sacred Places,” 281.
29. Deloria, “Sacred Places,” 281.
30. Deloria marks out this fourth sense of sacred places to show how indigenous religion is not static but, in fact, actively engages with the world as a living practice. The US federal government denies the further expansion of sacred indigenous sites and, therefore, denies the living and changing aspects of native culture and religion.
31. Referring back to my earlier note on terminology, sacred places are places in which we can receive moral guidance or engage with community practices. For one to behave morally, these locations are necessary to inform our actions, but moral activity

extends beyond these sacred places. Furthermore, sacred places are not entirely sacred because of the moral lessons which are tied to it. Rather, they are sacred in themselves. It might seem tautological, but a place is sacred because our activity with it makes this known. Additionally, all things are sacred within most indigenous understandings of reality.

32. The terms past, present, and future are still somewhat derivative of Christian linear temporality, however, for the sake of clarity and later problematization of these terms, I use them here.
33. Some linguistic limitations appear here as I try to discuss the orientation of past, present, and future from a spatial account of time. Where Christian linear time maintains this order to show history and a society's eventual destination, to engage and describe *local time* requires us to problematize these terms and show their limitations when applied to a spatial perspective. Deloria's account of sacred places enables our active participation in time via our engagement with space.
34. We are responsible to others in preserving the potential for the wellbeing of those who came before and those who will follow. This is similar to some existing frameworks of relational ethics. While I am approaching from within the canon of indigenous scholars that articulate their distinct cultural and spiritual perspective, in future works, I want to develop how these are similar and dissimilar from feminist ethical accounts as well.
35. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 2.
36. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 22–23. These are dense concepts. While I do my best to describe them briefly here, I can only include a partial description to how power and place function for Deloria and Wildcat overall. Place is geographical but it also denotes a particular way in which one is in relation to others. Place is distinct to the entity in question. To understand one's power, we have to inspect how one influence others and how they are influenced in return. This is cyclical in a relational sense but not yet in the temporal. I will focus on this aspect of cyclicity in the next section of this paper.
37. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 22–23.
38. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 140.
39. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 144.
40. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 144.
41. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 13.
42. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 13.
43. Because places have the potential to be sacred, they must also be treated as sacred in our current moment.
44. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 44.
45. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 44.
46. Protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), are prime examples of what it means to consider place as a site of relations between people and other living things. Its proposed route crosses the Missouri River, and, in event of an oil spill, its position jeopardizes clean water for people and ecosystems downriver. The Missouri River is a site of immense power. Its influence not only includes those that directly partake in it but also includes the water sources which it feeds and supplies.
47. Deloria, "Thinking in Time and Space," 67.
48. At the beginning, I wrote a footnote describing how I use place and space interchangeably. Following the discussion on place in the first section, I want to add that I sometimes use these terms interchangeably with land. This does not completely entail all of the same characteristics as place. Land operates as an agent which organizes us in space and so we are placed by it. To some degree, land operates as the key entity which always has a sense of place. While we have become delocalized through a sense of time, land has remained local and particular, although it has lost its robust sense of sacredness. It is worth clarifying, however, that everything is placed, so land does not singularly refer to place.
49. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the P3 formula is defined as Power + Place = Personality.
50. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 145.
51. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 22–23.
52. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 145.
53. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 145.
54. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 23.
55. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 75. Wildcat articulates the undergirding claim that Deloria makes: Power + Place = Personality as motivated by the elimination of the nature/human distinction. By realizing that there is no separation, we can better understand that nature and our place within the world is always embedded with others. Wildcat, speaking on Deloria's account, writes, "Deloria's power-and-place-equal-personality equation, or P3 formula, makes for a spatial metaphysics of experience. The TC3 expression, technology, community, communication, and culture, is an attempt to identify the natural cultural feature of human beingness. P3 and TC3 are not rigorous mathematical expressions; rather, I think both are symbolic expressions that can serve as mnemonic devices that preclude thinking of technology, or for that matter any of the key features of human culture, as outside of nature."
56. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 25.
57. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 25.
58. To clarify further, while there is some element of teleology present in cyclical time, the key idea is that time is distinct to the beings and our particular relationships to them. Further, time is not made universal like in the case of Western linear time. Time as cycles remains oriented towards the particular and cannot be abstracted away from it. Similarly, growth does mean maturity, but maturity is always in reference to the being in question, not a general state that something immediately develops into. Instead, maturity is a characteristic relative to the individual and its/their way of engaging with others. For instance, some plants mature when they bear fruit, and some people mature differently than others.
59. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 22–23.
60. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 26.
61. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 26.
62. Deloria, "Thinking in Time and Space," 69.
63. Deloria, "Thinking in Time and Space," 69.
64. Deloria, "Thinking Through Time and Space," 69.
65. At this point, I would also like to flag the possibility of there being ways in which technology can further expand and enable us to maintain communal relations across vast distances. Consider the instantaneous communication we can achieve today. Someone can live in one time zone and work in an entirely different time zone all while maintaining their relationships across time and space. Geography might still be limiting in regard to accessing a sacred location, but communal relations offer one way considering these questions.
66. Deloria, "The Nature of 'Religion,'" 125–26.
67. Deloria, "The Nature of 'Religion,'" 125–26. Changed from "themselves" to "ourselves" to show how many of the readers that engage with this work are coming from a Western frame of mind and temporal ordering.
68. Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 115.

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Wahkootowin Vegetarianism: When Is It Okay to Eat Your Kin?

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Perhaps the most famous food item of the North American Plains Nations behind bannock is pemmican—a mixture of animal fat, dried meat, and sometimes dried berries. Pemmican is an exceptionally calorie-dense food, useful for survival during long journeys or in the harsh conditions of the Canadian subarctic.¹ The use of animal products for survival is a long history of the Plains peoples. However, as conditions have changed, the lifestyle of Indigenous peoples has also changed.² In this paper, I want to draw on the ethical principles of the Métis nation to argue that for most Métis people, it is now impermissible to kill animals for their meat. But to make that argument, I want to start by making the complementary argument: for some Métis people, it is permissible to hunt and consume animals. The conditions under which hunting is permissible are quite demanding, however, and once I have explained them, it will be clear why most Métis people ought to be vegetarians, according to principles drawn from our own tradition.

To make my case, I first introduce *wahkootowin*, a Métis/Cree term which is translated here as *kinship*. I will explain four key features of kinship: mutual support, reciprocity, decency, and order.³ I argue that mutual support places quite pressing demands on us if we want killing to be permissible. Reciprocity, order, and decency also limit our conduct regarding others.⁴ Taken together, the principles of *wahkootowin* require concrete, nontransferrable acts of support for the land and the creatures on that land to make hunting permissible. It would be exceedingly rare for a Métis person living in an urban area, where alternatives are available, to meet these demands. For most Métis people, then, it is almost always impermissible to hunt animals and to consume meat.

WHEN IT'S OKAY TO EAT YOUR KIN

As I said above, I will begin by laying out the case for eating kin. First, let me give a brief explanation of *wahkootowin*, the central ethical concept I use to understand Métis ethical thought. *Wahkootowin* has a few important features for us here. First, the concept of *wahkootowin* has a very wide scope. Métis elder Maria Campbell says that while the term

is often used only for human familial relations now, "at one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and interconnected to all things within it. *Wahkootowin*⁵ means honoring and respecting those relationships."⁶ The wide scope of *wahkootowin* relationships brings along with it a wide scope of obligations. There are obligations that arise between humans and other humans, but also between humans and nonhuman animals, humans and plants, and humans and the land.⁷

On a *wahkootowin* view of ethics, it can't be the status of kin that makes eating impermissible. Otherwise, it would be impermissible to eat plants! We need another explanation.⁸ And I want to take a more difficult case than plants, since the permissibility of consuming plants is not controversial. So, let us consider the case of the buffalo. The Plains Nations have historic relationships with the buffalo which are ancient, ongoing, and involve hunting and consumption.⁹ Among the Cree and Métis for whom *wahkootowin* is a central concept in ethical life, clearly, it is sometimes permissible to hunt and consume beings to whom we have a *wahkootowin* relationship. It is in keeping with *wahkootowin* principles to sometimes eat kin.

First, we will see what each of the four main characteristics of *wahkootowin* have to say about the topic. As we go, I will develop my interpretation of each characteristic and apply it to this case. We will go along in the order Macdougall presents them: first mutual support, then reciprocity, decency, and finally order.¹⁰ Throughout, I will emphasize a feature of *wahkootowin* relationships that is vital to my argument and comes from the nature of kinship relations in general: the idea that kinship relationships are not fungible. The relata of *wahkootowin* relationships are not interchangeable; the particulars of the related parties are relevant to the relationship itself, and so are the obligations and privileges generated by that relationship.

MUTUAL SUPPORT

It is hardly hyperbolic to say that killing and consuming another being seems like almost the *least* supportive act one could take toward them. So, it looks like mutual support might be impossible in conditions of killing and consumption. But upon reflection, it is not so clear. I think there are two ways to look at this. First, we might say that it is the buffalo as a collective to which the Plains Nations provide support. If we go this way, then we can say that some hunting is permissible, as long as the Nations continue protecting the land and the herds. In this case, mutual support is met because the buffalo provide the means of subsistence, and the Plains Nations provide the means of life for the buffalo in return, through their stewardship of the land.

There is something too easy about this response, however. *Wahkootowin* relations can form the basis of nation-to-nation or group-to-group obligations.¹¹ But what about the case of an individual hunter and an individual buffalo? Reference to the collective does not explain how that hunter is upholding their *wahkootowin* obligations to that particular buffalo. If we model our moral relationships off of kinship relationships, then the most basic case seems

to be a direct relation between two beings, not a nation-to-nation relation.¹² Collective support might be a sufficient explanation for some less impactful action, but it seems that the scale of harm that killing involves is out of step with the support offered by supporting the collective buffalo. The collective relationship between the people and the buffalo is not sufficient to justify the hunting of individual buffalo.

Instead, we need to focus on what mutual support means in the relationship between individual people and individual buffalo. So, let us step into the relationship of hunter and hunted. The support that the hunter receives from the body of the buffalo is relatively clear: sustenance and the means to sustain their life. This *could* be a legitimate case of support, since it is clearly analogous to the support received from plants. Could killing possibly be compatible with the hunter supporting the hunted, though? I think that it can be, if we pay attention to the nature of the relationship. The nature of a relationship that involves hunting is certainly complicated, and I think it is important to be careful about how we define such a relationship. There is a real danger of defining the relationship in such a way that it is trivial to get the answer that one desires.

What sort of definition of the relationship is appropriate? Well, it is more than mere *co-inhabitant*. The songbird in my back yard and I are co-inhabitants of Lək̓ʷəŋən territory. Our lives and needs almost never intersect, except when we startle each other in passing.¹³ In a relationship that involves hunting, and for that hunting to be permissible, we need something more intimate than mere cohabitation. For the sake of ease, here, we can call this sort of relationship a *producer-consumer* relationship: I think that captures the plant case as well as the animal case. It also indicates that one important piece of the relationship is that one party is involved in taking from the other in some way. The question then becomes how such a relationship could fulfill the *wahkootowin* principles necessary to make hunting permissible.

I want to argue that mutual support is only plausibly met when the hunter is hunting for sustenance and when the hunter contributes properly to the land that supports the hunted creature, and to the hunted creature itself. The sort of contribution that is appropriate will vary from place to place, and from relationship to relationship. However, there are some practices that I think are clearly carried out as a means to fulfill this requirement. Some of the examples I take here will not come from Plains Nations, but I use them because I think that the insight here (and the permissibility of hunting) extends beyond the Plains Nations: other Indigenous peoples also stand in relations that make their hunting activities permissible, even if their ethical systems justify these activities in different ways.

So, let us begin with the laying down of tobacco: a classic in the stereotypical Native American depiction but a useful case for us here. What is the purpose of laying down gifts of any kind? First, many folks believe that the giving of the gift is an act of spiritual importance, exchanging energies or spiritual power with the land and the creature hunted.¹⁴ If this is right, then the case for mutual support becomes

much easier to make. But I do not want to make the easy argument, since I am myself not a particularly spiritual Indigenous person. So, for those of us less inclined to think along the lines of spirit gifting, what is to be said? I think that the laying down of tobacco, or other ceremonial actions around hunting, are one step in the process of making sure that the taking of animal life is carried out according to the principles of *wahkootowin*. However, the laying down of tobacco is not responsive to the mutual support requirement unless we think that there is a spiritual component to such activities. Mutual support must come from elsewhere, on a more secular view of *wahkootowin* ethics.

I think that mutual support, on the more secular *wahkootowin* view I prefer, consists in actions outside of gift-giving or the laying down of offerings and prayers. That's not to say that those actions don't have a place in my view (more on this later), but they do not serve the same purpose as they do for the more spiritual version of the *wahkootowin* view. Instead, mutual support for the hunted animal involves not just a general appeal to support for the community of the hunted creature, but concrete acts of support for the creature itself, or made in the anticipation that the creature would benefit. In this case, we can think of actions like controlled burns, the repatriation of unused remains to the ecosystem for recycling into the land, and the eventual fate of the hunter themselves, dying and returning to the land to support the creatures in the ecosystem.

Some positive obligations can be taken from what I have just said. In particular, the return of unused parts of a creature's body to the ecosystem from which they were taken is vital. It is true that this does not support the hunted creature, but it *does* provide support for the future creatures taken in a hunt. If I hunt near my home every year, then returning the unused remains to the site of the hunt (or reasonably nearby) will return the energy and nutrients to that ecosystem, which can provide support for the next generation of creatures, of whom I might later take once again. Controlled burns are another example—they can provide direct support to the hunted animal, in advance of the hunting, through preserving and providing resources to the ecosystem the creature depends on.

The key piece here is that these activities need to be carried out for a length of time before any act of "taking" becomes permissible. It is not enough for me, an urban Métis person, to move out to the country and begin to hunt because I promise I'll later care for the ecosystem—even *if I follow through on this promise*. To make hunting permissible would require me to spend enough time on the land to reasonably provide actual support for actual creatures who I might later hunt. This means that the process of forming the right kind of connection involves caretaking actions for a wide range of land for many months or even years, depending on the proposed hunting activity. It would take much longer for me to act in such a way that I am able to permissibly hunt buffalo than a rabbit, for instance, because the buffalo grow much more slowly, range across a good deal of territory, and so on. In all likelihood, I might reasonably expect to provide very little support for a buffalo over the course of even several years. On the other hand,

careful tending to the land might result in tangible support for smaller creatures which live in closer proximity over those several years.

My examples here might look like a recourse to my earlier answer about collective obligations to preserve the land, which I rejected. But I want to resist saying that my answer here is just a clever repackaging of a doctrine of collective support. There are two reasons: first, the examples I give do not fall prey to worries about fungibility. My examples require *me* to carry out particular actions. The actions of the Métis nation to preserve some land in Manitoba, for example, would not license me to go out to the land in Manitoba and hunt. I do not live on the land in Manitoba, and I do not have the connections to the ecosystem that would legitimate my hunting there. It is *my* contribution to *that* land and its support for *those* animals that meets (or fails, in my case) the principles of *wahkootowin* like mutual support.

Second, my examples are not examples of collective permission or support because they come with the temporal proviso—I am not covertly appealing to “supporting the buffalo as a Whole” or “supporting the land” because my examples demand that I actually have a reasonable expectation that my activities are carried out over a long enough time, and are impactful enough, that they *actually* provide support for *particular* beings. There is a distinction, then, between the argument for collective caretaking that I reject and the argument for individual, concrete acts of support for an ecosystem that I accept. The distinction lies in the fungibility of the obligations, and the temporal proviso I place on permissibility. The reason that the advocacy and stewardship of the Métis nation does not (on its own) license me to hunt in their territory is because the proper relationship between me and the land and creatures needs to be *direct* and is not transferrable.¹⁵ The directness is a result of the nature of the obligations generated by *wahkootowin* relations, and the fact that those relations themselves are always direct.¹⁶ It is not sufficient to depend on the advocacy and care of the Métis nation to make my eating meat permissible. To make eating meat permissible requires a mutually supportive, direct relationship between beings.

RECIPROCITY

Next, reciprocity. Here it is important to note that reciprocity is not identical to mutual support. In fact, as I will argue, it places extra demands on us in cases where relationships are unequal. In cases where the support offered by parties is more equal, it’s easy to see how reciprocity can be fulfilled as long as mutual support is fulfilled. A relationship of mutual caretaking is sometimes given as a definition of reciprocity.¹⁷ So, if we satisfy mutual support, i.e., if we take care of another and they take care of us, we have a relationship that exhibits reciprocity. So, one might say, a success in the act of hunting is the animal providing support for the hunter; as long as the hunter fulfills their side of the obligation, reciprocity is established and fulfilled. Another part of reciprocity can be the laying down of gifts and advocacy for the land and creatures. But if, as I maintain, the relationship of hunting is necessarily unequal, then reciprocity is not satisfied just because mutual support

is satisfied. In cases of unequal relationships—like a relationship in which one party is killed—I characterize reciprocity as imposing increased demands of partiality and respect for some particular others.

In the case of hunting, I think it’s clear the relationship *is* asymmetrical. The Plains Nations depend on the buffalo in a way that the buffalo do not depend on the Plains Nations, as far as hunting is concerned (buffalo do not eat people). I have already given an account that I think fulfills the demands of mutual support. It should be clear from what I’ve said above that the dependency relations between Plains Nations and the buffalo are not symmetrical. Reciprocity is partially satisfied by the requirement for mutual support, but not completely. The fact that a hunter takes *so much* from a buffalo when it takes its life, and can offer so much less in return, means that more is needed to fully satisfy reciprocity. A consumer relationship to the buffalo also requires an attitude of partiality and respect on the part of the Plains Nations toward the plains themselves and toward the creatures that live there.

Part of reciprocity is a commitment to respect toward other beings and the land itself. This respect manifests as a recognition of the authority of other beings to be included in our practical deliberation. To respect someone, in other words, is to take their needs, desires, and interests (their *ends*, in what follows) as relevant to our own practical deliberation. When we are trying to decide what to do, we have to take their ends as reasons in our deliberation. This doesn’t mean that we abandon our own ends. Sometimes, what we owe to other beings is compatible with pursuing our own ends. And sometimes our ends outweigh the ends of others.

Respect only demands that we take others into account and take their ends seriously. The partiality requirement is much more straightforward—it makes good sense for me to feel more protective, to have more affection or positive feelings towards those beings who are close to me and who figure in my life most centrally. And indeed, the requirement for reciprocity demands that I feel positively toward those beings with whom I have asymmetrical *wahkootowin* relationships. The beings in my life that support me but that I can do little to support, like the trees and waters of my home, are owed partiality from me in virtue of the work they do to support my life.

This is a natural place to state explicitly that recognizing the ends of another being requires *attention* to the needs and capacities of that other being. But attention to those needs and capacities does not mean that nonhuman beings are ethically relevant *in virtue of* their capacities. On my view, it is not the ability to suffer that makes a nonhuman being morally relevant, nor the nascent rational autonomy of a human child that makes them count, morally speaking. *Wahkootowin* includes relations to all beings—a universal sense of kinship with the world and its inhabitants that brings all beings into the moral realm.¹⁸ Attention to the capacities of the creatures at issue comes to be important when we begin to ask ourselves questions about how we could support another being, or what might be indecent to inflict upon them.

I argue that reciprocity is possible in relationships that involve killing and consuming. It is possible only when the requirements of mutual support are met and involves taking the ends of the beings under consideration as serious reasons for acting or refraining from acting. And

indeed, there are examples of just this happening. When the buffalo herd in Saint Albert National Park in Saskatchewan faced a declining population, members of the *mistawasis nēhiyawak* First Nation recognized that overhunting was a major part of the problem.¹⁹ Among other things, an educational campaign was called for to teach Indigenous hunters about the status of the herd and discourage overhunting. The population has since begun to recover.²⁰ In this case, when the needs of the animals were understood by the hunters, change was taken to prioritize the ends of the beings on the land over the hunters. In this case, it is not just the buffalo themselves who were taken into account, since the buffalo are a “keystone” species in their habitats and the health of the entire ecosystem improves when buffalo are present.²¹

The ends not just of the buffalo but the entire ecosystem of their territory was taken into consideration by the hunters of that territory. This is a demonstration of respect in the sense that we discuss above. In this case, as long as the demands of mutual respect are met, we have two of the four *wahkootowin* principles being fulfilled by hunters. I do not mean here to weigh in on the particular case of the *mistawasis nēhiyawak* and the herd near their territory, to attempt to decide whether their hunting is permissible. I take their story only as an example of respect being shown to the land and other beings, especially the beings who are hunted. Sometimes, respect and partiality involve knowing when *not* to hunt.

DECENCY

The third *wahkootowin* principle, decency, has to do with what makes an action impermissible. If some act would be indecent, it is therefore impermissible. The question of precisely what makes something indecent is complicated to answer, but it has to do with what I elsewhere call the *success conditions* of the relationship between individuals. The success conditions for a relationship are, of course, sensitive to the context of the relationship—the parties involved, the nature of the relationship, and so on. However, the basic idea is that every relationship comes along with normative conditions. The purpose of a relationship of guardianship between a child and guardian, for example, involves providing the child with the proper protection and resources to allow the child to grow into healthy maturity. The precise requirements of that relationship will change over time, depending on material and technological resources, social structures, and so on.

Success conditions will be somewhat culturally sensitive, in addition to being sensitive to context and capacities even within a single culture. Nonetheless, we can say a little about the success conditions of a producer-consumer relationship to help make this part of the *wahkootowin* view clear. I want to argue that the producer-consumer relationship still involves some success conditions that have to do with cruelty and wastefulness, because of the

extreme nature of killing and consuming. Care is especially owed because of the *prima facie* impermissibility of killing and consuming. One success condition of the consumer-producer relationship is that the killing and consuming needs to be done in a way that is careful to avoid undue pain and suffering. This is a display of respect, since it takes the interests of the animal and the land into consideration in the way that respect demands.

Care and respect manifest, in the most general case, as prohibitions on cruelty and wastefulness. That means that in the most general case of the producer-consumer relationship, it is indecent for the consumer to cause undue harm or suffering to the producer, and it is indecent for the consumer to waste anything that they take from the producer. These results are hardly surprising—we see similar sorts of admonitions in many cultures. Robin Wall Kimmerer discusses just the same sorts of prohibitions on harm and waste in her guidelines for what she calls the Honorable Harvest: two of the guidelines are “harvest in a way that minimizes harm” and “use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.”²² These prohibitions are general and unsurprising. They are general and unsurprising because these are the most general versions of the prohibitions brought about by the requirement of decency. The details—perhaps other, more surprising details—depend on the nature of relationships and the beings involved in the relationship. What is decent or indecent varies, as said above, based on context.

ORDER

Finally, we can spend some time discussing *order*, the final *wahkootowin* principle that must be met by anyone considering eating meat. I interpret order not as a call for a rigid hierarchy of kinship relationships, but rather as an *ideal* of smooth functioning of kinship relationships to which we should aspire, and as an ideal against which we can judge our actions in deliberation. The question of what it means for a kinship relationship to function smoothly is, again, not one that can be answered in the abstract. To answer that question, we must consider the purpose of a particular relationship, the sorts of dependencies that give rise to the relationship, and what it would mean to ensure the continuation of the relationship and the fulfillment of its success conditions, given the needs and capacities of the related parties.

In other words, we need to imagine what, in an ideal world, the relationship would demand of the parties so related. When we deliberate about what to do, we need to keep that imagined, ideal relationship in mind as a guide against which to examine our conduct. When we think of what an orderly network of *wahkootowin* relationships would look like, all of those relationships living up to the other principles and the obligations they generate, we can compare the sort of world our proposed actions would create in order to see if our proposed course of action is one that supports that ideal network of *wahkootowin* relationships or works against it. This is, of course, a complicated question in many cases, and in many cases reasonable people can disagree on the assessment of particular actions. Nonetheless, the guiding notion of a smoothly functioning network of kinship relationships is what order brings to the table, and

the value that it has for us in considering the question of whether and when to kill and consume other beings.

My interpretation of order comes, in part, from a picture of the world given by Jicarilla Apache philosopher Viola Cordova. In her poem “How It Is: A Native American Creation Story,” Cordova gives a description of the world as she sees it:

Picture a landscape of shifting sand
 Nothing stays still
 Yet it is the same.
 The sand ripples
 Forms dunes Shifts.
 This is the way of the Universe:
 Stable shifting
 Shifting stability.²³

Cordova also describes the universe as “harmonious, balanced, and stable despite occasional and temporary suddenness.”²⁴ This notion of a stable but dynamic system is how order appears in *wahkootowin*, too, I argue. Networks of kinship fit the description Cordova gives above. The various beings offer matter and energy to the system and also take matter and energy from the system. New beings enter the system, others pass out of the system. Still, it is possible to have a sort of dynamic stability—order—in the system. Order serves as a sort of normative ideal, then, because we can frame the general stability of the system as a kind of exemplary state. Generally speaking, the promotion of stability is preferable, since the network of kin relations is based on relations of dependence and mutual support. It is practically wise and morally good to promote the stability of that system, since without it we would be left without the relations that make our lives possible and allow us to pursue our ends and fulfill our obligations.

Now that I have given a brief explanation of how the four principles of *wahkootowin* bear on the question of eating meat, I can give the short version of the conditions under which it is permissible to eat meat. First, in cases where life and death are on the line, it is permissible to eat meat if it is otherwise impossible to keep oneself, or those under one’s care, adequately fed. This is an easy case, and hardly worth mentioning except to emphasize that the permissibility of eating meat changes in accordance with the material and technological conditions of a society. At one time, especially in the Métis homeland of the subarctic and prairies, the question of the permissibility of eating meat would hardly have been worth considering. The harsh and uncertain conditions of life in the historic North West would have made it impossible or impractical to depend only on a vegetarian diet. This also settles the question for those who have a medical reason to need meat (though it does not remove them from prohibitions on cruelty and wastefulness).

Putting aside the question of direct need, I want to give a picture of the sorts of conditions under which it would be permissible to choose to eat meat, on a *wahkootowin* view. The demands of mutual support, as I explained above, require a nonfungible and nontransferable long-term relationship to the land on which the hunting takes place.

The hunter needs to carry out concrete acts of support for the land before and after the hunt. Reciprocity, at least in the form of partiality and respect for the creatures of that land, must be met. The hunter must refrain from acting in any indecent manner toward the objects of the hunt. This requires at least a commitment to avoiding undue harm (cruelty) and avoiding wastefulness. And finally, in their decision to hunt, the hunter must deliberate and consider whether the act of hunting is in accordance with the smooth functioning of *wahkootowin* relationships on that land.

WAHKOOTOWIN VEGETARIANISM

I have explained why it is sometimes permissible to eat meat on my *wahkootowin* view of ethics.

Next, I want to argue that the relationships required to make eating meat permissible hold for very few people. In a sentence, my view is that it is sometimes permissible to eat meat, but almost anyone reading such an argument in an academic paper will stand in relation to animals such that it is impermissible for them to eat meat. This should not be surprising, given the demands of mutual support, reciprocity, decency, and order. As we saw, mutual support requires much of a relationship to make killing permissible. Living in an urban setting, the demands of *wahkootowin* relationships that allow killing are almost always, I argue, too demanding to be met.

The main issue with urban living is that our connection to the land and animals we might consume is too distant and too mediated. Recall that the demands of mutual support require, at least, nontransferable acts of support for the land and the creatures on it. I think that the *permissibility* of hunting is likewise nontransferable. If I have a vegetarian cousin on the land who happens to live well, that doesn’t license me to come to the land and hunt in their stead. The demands of the relationship and the permissions generated by the meeting of those demands are not transferable. They are not transferable as a result of the nature of *wahkootowin* relationships as kinship relationships—kinship relationships often generate obligations and permissions that are nontransferable. I can engage in romantic acts with my spouse, in virtue of meeting the demands of our relationship. I could not engage in romantic acts with my sibling’s spouse in virtue of my sibling meeting the demands of their relationship. If I were allowed to do so at all, it would have to be in virtue of another sort of relationship that holds between me and my sibling’s spouse.

There is a further practical problem with eating meat in an urban setting: It would be impractical to treat animals well enough for urban people to be able to meet the demands of mutual support. The amount of space that would be necessary to house the animals for an entire city to kill and consume would mean that the outskirts of every major city would need to be many hundreds of square kilometers of pasture and woodland. This is because, of course, the conditions in contemporary farms are obviously incompatible with the demands for decency, for respect, and for mutual support. I am pessimistic that raising any animal for food could be done in a way that meets all the *wahkootowin* principles, but even if it were possible,

industrial agriculture certainly fails to meet these demands. A radical transformation of the agricultural industry would be required to make meat eating permissible for city dwellers, and even then, it would require change to so much land that the obligations from respect and mutual support for *other* creatures would be abandoned.

So, the argument for a *wahkootowin*²⁵ vegetarianism is relatively straightforward. For Métis people living in situations where we do not have the relationships to the land that make it possible to fulfill our obligations to our nonhuman kin, it is *prima facie* impermissible to eat meat. While precise and up-to-date data is hard to find, it's clear that there has been a trend of increasing urbanization of Indigenous people in Canada.²⁶ The Métis are no exception. It is safe to say that for *at least* half of Métis people, they live urban lives which make the relationships to the land and other beings too mediated and distant to fulfill their *wahkootowin* obligations and make hunting permissible.²⁷ Since most of us can survive without eating meat, the principles of *wahkootowin* demand that we do so. I recognize that this conclusion is different than that drawn by many Indigenous people, urban or not. Eating meat is an important part of ceremony and culture for many Indigenous people, and traditional education often involves practical knowledge, like hunting. I want to move on from my argument, short and straightforward as it is, to complicate matters immediately and discuss exceptions and problem cases for the broad argument for vegetarianism that I've just given.

EXCEPTIONS AND CAVEATS

I've just given the short version of the *wahkootowin* argument for vegetarianism: almost no Métis person living off the land (by which I mean the opposite of "on the land," rather than "off the land" in the colloquial sense, i.e., depending on the land) is in a position to eat meat in a way that satisfies the requirements generated by *wahkootowin* relationships. It is only permissible to eat meat if one can satisfy the requirements generated by *wahkootowin* relationships. Therefore, it is permissible for almost no Métis person living off the land to eat meat. I think this argument is sound, but I also think there are many cases that are either unclear or straightforward exceptions.

First, the case of hunting for money. I think that hunting for commercial purposes—to sell or trade the meat, in other words—cannot on the face of it satisfy *wahkootowin* principles. But things are not always this clear. What about the case in which someone hunts to sell meat to buy a medication they need to live? It seems (and I think it is true) that this is a case of hunting where hunting is a matter of life and death for the hunter. So, caveat 1: hunting for money can be permissible, given the hunter satisfies the requirements of mutual support insofar as they are able, and the proceeds of the hunt are necessary for the hunter to live. We can extend this to cases in which a dependent child or other family member would be in danger without the proceeds of the hunt as well.

Next, consider gifts. I think that it *can* be permissible for Métis people living off the land to eat meat, if they meet a couple conditions: first, the meat must be hunted by a

hunter for whom it is permissible to engage in the hunting. Second, the meat must be freely given as a gift, and in particular as a gift *fulfilling or establishing some part of a wahkootowin relationship*. The exchange of gifts is a part of how *wahkootowin* relationships are established and maintained,²⁸ and so the meat can be gifted by the hunter as a part of some other *wahkootowin* relationship. In this case, if the meat is hunted in a way that satisfies the demands of *wahkootowin*, the transfer of the meat is permissible. To be clear, it is not a transfer of the permissibility of hunting that is at issue, but rather the changing of the meat itself into a gift which is no longer commodified in the same way that it would be in an economic exchange.

Here is a good place to stop and discuss the idea of commodification. For my purposes here, a commodity is something that is traded in some market exchange. It has an exchange value, in other words—a price, in whatever currency, that someone is willing to pay the hunter for it. And it is precisely this exchange value, the idea that two things are interchangeable or *fungible*, that I think makes economic exchange of the products of hunting *prima facie* impermissible. Because the relationship that makes hunting permissible is nonfungible, and the act of market exchange presupposes the fungibility of the objects exchanged—the money, for example, is taken to be "worth" the meat, or fungible with it in some sense—there is a contradiction inherent in the market exchange of the proceeds of hunting. But this only exists in a market exchange of two supposedly fungible objects or commodities. In the case of gifts, no such contradiction is inherent in the idea of exchange, even reciprocal or mutual exchange.²⁹

This caveat can be extended to ceremonial uses of the proceeds of hunting as well. As long as the meat has been hunted in a way that is permissible according to *wahkootowin* principles, if that meat is given to someone other than the hunter in the course of a ceremony, I think that consuming the meat can be permissible. It is important to note here, though, that I do not think that it would be permissible for *me*, an urban Métis person, to go hunt for ceremonial purposes. These caveats are not meant to make it permissible to hunt meat, only to consume it. The nonfungibility of the demands of *wahkootowin* relationships means that it is *prima facie* impermissible for someone to eat meat they did not hunt and did not hunt in the right way. The caveats here apply only to the permissibility to *consume* the proceeds of the hunt. They do not make it permissible to hunt.

Finally, an important caveat is that the *wahkootowin* ethics I have drawn on for my argument is not meant to be a comprehensive ethics for all people in all places at all times. It is an ethic drawn from the culture of the Métis and Cree people, and I claim only my own authority as a Métis person in making this argument. I have drawn on the words of my nation to craft this argument. I think it is correct for many Métis people to be vegetarian, based on the interpretation of *wahkootowin* and argument I give above. Nevertheless, I know that our relatives in other nations live in different conditions and by different concepts.

I intend here to give an argument for vegetarianism drawn from Métis principles, but not an argument that should apply to all nations. I have even noted that this argument does not advise vegetarianism for all Métis people. So, I hope it is clear that I have nothing to say about the diet and practices of other Indigenous nations and people. I would be failing to offer them the respect and partiality they deserve—I would be violating the *wahkootowin* principles of my own system of ethics—if I sought to speak for them or to offer an argument that I claim holds for all Indigenous people. The final caveat of this piece is that *wahkootowin*, like the obligations it generates, is particular, nontransferrable, concrete, and only intelligible and applicable in a Métis context.

NOTES

1. Foster, "Pemmican."
2. Statistics Canada, "Canada's Indigenous Population."
3. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 8.
4. Miller, "Obligation, Accountability, and Anthropocentrism in Second-Personal Ethics," 14.
5. Campbell's variant spelling here is only the result of a difference in orthography, not in the concept at issue.
6. Campbell, "We Need a Return to the Principles of Wahkohtowin."
7. Campbell, "We Need a Return to the Principles of Wahkohtowin."
8. We might also stop here—why is it permissible to eat kin? Because it's permissible to eat plants, and plants are kin. But the fact that it is permissible to eat some kin does not do enough. Because it is also clearly impermissible to eat some kin: *human* kin. So there must be a more complicated account of the movement from kin generally to particular instances.
9. Saunders and Dubois, *Métis Politics and Governance in Canada*, 19–22.
10. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 8.
11. Gaudry, *Kaa-Tipeyimishoyaahk – 'We Are Those Who Own Ourselves'*, 208–12.
12. Miller, "Obligation, Accountability, and Anthropocentrism," 15; 18.
13. This does not mean that we do not affect each other, though—the bird has important roles in the local ecosystem, and I can make choices that are better or worse in relation to the bird. For the purposes of this essay, though, the point is that we are not going to be as intimately connected as an animal I consider a candidate for food.
14. Ghostkeeper, *Spirit Gifting*, 12.
15. Miller, "Obligation, Accountability, and Anthropocentrism," 15; 18.
16. Miller, "Obligation, Accountability, and Anthropocentrism," 15; 18.
17. Meissner, "Teaching Reciprocity," 18.
18. Macdougall, *One of the Family* 3; Campbell, "We Need to Return to the Principles of Wahkotowin."
19. Derworiz, "Bison Population at Risk in Prince Albert National Park Due to Overhunting: Study."
20. Taylor, "Wild Bison in Prince Albert National Park See Signs of Growth after Years of Population Decline."
21. Derworiz, "Bison Population at Risk"; Crosschild et al., "Awakening Buffalo Consciousness, 14.
22. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 183. Cited in Wahinkpe Topa and Darcia Narvaez, *Restoring the Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing Life on Planet Earth*, 90.
23. Cordova, *How It Is*, 92.
24. Cordova, *How It Is*, 117.
25. While I want to limit this discussion to *wahkootowin*, I suspect Indigenous people from other nations will see things in this argument which are recognizable in the broad stroke, if not the details.
26. *Statistics Canada*, "Canada's Indigenous Population," 2023.
27. I am using one's status as urban here as a proxy for one's relationship as being too distant or mediated. But it is not enough merely to live outside urban areas. And it is possible, though I suspect very unlikely, that an urban Métis person could maintain these relationships and fulfill the obligations so as to make hunting permissible.
28. Adam Gaudry, *Kaa-Tipeyimishoyaahk - 'We Are Those Who Own Ourselves': A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830-1870* (University of Victoria, 2014), 144-5.
29. Much more can be said here. A full description of a gift economy, and the implications it has for *wahkootowin* ethics and the argument I have made here is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, I am open to the idea that in a gift economy, it might be more possible for more hunting and consumption of meat to be permissible.

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APA STUDIES ON

Philosophy and the Black Experience

ANTHONY SEAN NEAL AND BJÖRN FRETER, CO-EDITORS

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FROM THE EDITORS

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Dear All, without exception,

We address you all in this way for two reasons. On the one hand, to choose a formulation that leaves no room for misunderstanding regarding its radical acceptance of all, and on the other hand, because the greeting "Dear Colleagues" has recently acquired a sad aftertaste. It seems as if fear is one of the signatures of our time. Many people seem willing to create fear, and as a result, many others are forced to experience this fear. The result of overcoming fear can be freedom. We hope that with this new edition, even if only in the smallest way, we can make a contribution to making progress on the path to freedom.

As far as literary genres are concerned, there is a great variety to be found in this issue. However, through all the contributions there shines a philosophy of freedom. Darien Pollock provides a sophisticated philosophical continuation of Liam Kofi-Bright's "White Psychodrama." Alberto Urquidez, developing further an argument by Kwame Anthony Appiah, has written a passionate defense of the third party vote as a necessity of freedom. We present the comprehensive catalogue of "Good Practices for Improving Representation in Philosophy Departments" developed by the *Women in Philosophy/Demographics in Philosophy group* under the directorship of Nicole Hassoun. An important and hopefully helpful contribution in times when so much depends on those who teach and care for our next generations of philosophers. Any comments on this document are very welcome by the working group. Next, we are printing an interview with African philosopher Abosedo Priscilla Ipadeola, a fiery voice in the fight for freedom! This is to further continue our endeavor to foster collaborations between African and African American thinkers. Lastly, we have a review of a textbook that is used in countless classrooms. However, this book does teach philosophy only to a quite limited degree; above all, this book is a guide on how to not to change anything and yet flatter yourself that you have done so.

We sincerely hope, dear all, that you are doing well. And we hope to hear from you with any comments on this issue.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

APA Studies on Philosophy and the Black Experience is published by the Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers. Authors are encouraged to submit original articles and book reviews on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors welcome submissions written from any philosophical tradition, as long as they make a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors especially welcome submissions dealing with philosophical issues and problems in African American and Africana philosophy.

All article submissions should be between ten and twenty pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between five and seven pages (double spaced) in length. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biography of the author. Please send submissions electronically to apa.philbe.newsletter@gmail.com.

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FORMATTING GUIDELINES

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

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

ARTICLES

Who Sets the Stage? A Response to Liam Kofi-Bright's "White Psychodrama"

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Like artists, theorists are often called upon to disclose truths about the human condition. Sometimes this call is prompted by public demand—typically expressed through the uncomfortable silence of ordinary people. Other times, the desire for disclosure is imprinted upon the soul of the theorists themselves. Similar to the poets in Plato's *Republic*, a theorist is inspired to bear "witness."¹

I read Kofi-Bright's "White Psychodrama"² as channeling this age-old philosophical tradition. While some may see him as primarily engaged in cultural criticism, I think it's also important to recognize him as performing the role of a kind of societal stage-director.

For the naive among us, it's helpful to frame the doctrine of white supremacy as a collection of dramatic episodes. The intuition here is that, as a matter of interpretive strategy, we have good reason to identify the main characters of white culture's latest dramatic rendition, if only for the purpose of understanding how our own lives are reflected in this ever-evolving saga. It's tempting to see at least two of the featured character-types in Kofi-Bright's picture, namely, the Repenters and Repressers, as projecting new vocabulary onto an old script. James Baldwin captures the heart of this tragic narrative when he warns us that "White people don't know and they *don't want* to know."³

What's brilliant about Kofi-Bright's analysis is that he extends Baldwin's sentiment by chronicling not only how this "elite" attitude is definitive of the white cultural worldview but also how, as a practical orientation, it is undermined by a long-standing battle with itself.

Arguably, the most surprising feature of white culture is how it is constantly refashioning itself as a structure founded on a series of untenable contradictions.

This means that necessary to the maintenance of white cultural superiority is the solicitation of members of subordinate racial groups to audition for roles that would inch them ever closer to Center stage. These white cultural hopefuls are symbolic of an archetype Kofi-Bright refers to as the "PoC intellegensia."⁴ For the critical reviewer, this group is possibly the most instructive for making sense of our present-day global situation. If this characterization teaches us anything, it's that white culture and the "elite" attitude that informs it is not restricted to white-presenting bodies.

In my own work, I call this inter-subjective feature of white culture *the problem of white-mindedness*. As an explanatory tool, white-mindedness highlights the effect white culture

has on shaping the beliefs, values, and practices of non-white-presenting people. Kofi-Bright's construction of the PoC intellegensia archetypal figure provides a helpful way for understanding how important white-minded actors, i.e., PoC who are cosplaying as delegates of white culture, are for preserving the traditional Eurocentric social order.

But why focus on Center stage? This might be said to be one of W. E. B. Du Bois's greatest political mistakes. Anyone familiar with Du Bois's work is aware that, early in his career, he was obsessed with making the Black experience legible to the "Gentle Reader"⁵—his metonymic expression for the elite "white" cultural imagination.

In many ways, Du Bois's life serves as a cautionary tale for members of the PoC intelligentsia. Time after time, his plea for a comprehensive racial justice program fell on deaf ears. Like most Black leaders, Du Bois's vision of racial uplift involved Black people playing an active role in determining what "progress" should look like in Western society.

This group-based commitment is what presumably led to his departure from notable white-controlled organizations, such as the NAACP, an institution he helped create. After the U.S. government refused to renew his passport, Du Bois found refuge in Kwame Nkrumah's newly independent Ghana. Bitter from years of disappointment from his interaction with Repenters and Repressers, he died a staunch Pan-Africanist, championing many of the ideas of Marcus Garvey—someone that he initially despised, partly for Garvey's refusal to collaborate with the white elite class, but whose "fringe" perspective Du Bois had no choice but to appreciate in the twilight of his life.

I see Garvey as the epitome of Kofi-Bright's Non-Aligned character-type. For all his faults, perhaps there is one kernel of wisdom we can draw from Garvey's legacy: that he wasn't interested in talking to white people.

Garvey understood from the very beginning that one of the problems of trying to streamline racial uplift through white-dominated organizations is that the cultural outlook of whiteness is incapable of providing the tools of criticism essential for the subversion of the present social order. Du Bois seems to have learned this lesson a generation too late.

This brings me to my next point. In our social justice conversations, we should distinguish criticism from struggle. While every case of struggle involves the adoption of a critical attitude, not all acts of criticism are tied to a legacy of struggle. Criticism is motivated by individual skepticism and dissent. Struggle, on the other hand, requires a person to be tied to a tradition of collective resistance.

The Du Bois/Garvey dichotomy seems to suggest that there are better and worse ways to embody the Non-Aligned character-type. While critics like Du Bois were committed to changing prevailing anti-Black sentiments, white ideas, frameworks, and perspectives distracted him. This is most likely due to his close proximity to white-dominated institutions and his detachment from a struggle of resistance tied to a marginal, Black-centered space. In

other words, early-Du Bois, in many respects, was deeply white-minded.

But if struggle is necessary for nonalignment, what can a person do to make sure their criticism is connected to a *genuine* social movement? At this point, it would be helpful to borrow a distinction from Sylvia Wynter’s popular essay “No Humans Involved.” Echoing St. Clair Drake, known by many as the “Father of Black Studies,” Wynter argues that those participating in Black Studies, or any other form of critical inquiry, are responsible for two distinct tasks—namely, (1) intellectual tasks and (2) street tasks.⁶

To be an authentic expression of Kofi-Bright’s Non-Aligned character-type, a social critic must not limit themselves to the tools of inquiry that the status quo recognizes as legitimate—the various histories, theories, and frameworks made available by white-controlled institutions. Searching for communal traditions and spaces that are committed to a *history* of struggle against white culture—concerning their self with street tasks—should be a critic’s primary focus.

One might wonder, however, if genuine nonalignment is a product of a critic being involved in a marginal community with a history of engaging in struggle through street tasks, what is the point of this labor of love? Appreciating the value of street tasks opens up the possibility for one developing what I call *street knowledge*. In a nutshell, street knowledge is gained through approaching problem-spaces from a *position* of struggle. As a form of wisdom, it helps a critic remain cool under fire.

At the level of cognition, I see street knowledge as the product of what Du Bois calls “second-sight”⁷ or what I prefer to call the *street disposition*. We should never forget that Du Bois describes second-sight as “a gift.”⁸ I see the street disposition in the same light. It endows one with the *temperament* to develop the skills and capacities to sift through a discourse space cautiously, to weigh and evaluate what one finds, and synthesize what best serves their needs. In other words, it is a prerequisite for practicing what Kofi-Bright and Kwasi Wiredu call “conceptual decolonization.”⁹ It challenges us to pay attention to what is “off-stage.”

Like Kofi-Bright, I agree that the present (and past) white cultural war is a distraction for anyone dedicated to “flipping the script” of our present social order. It’s important to keep in mind, however, that only through the cultivation of a street disposition and the street knowledge it generates will we finally gain the courage and insight to kill the lights, dismantle the stage, and exit the theatre.

NOTES

1. See Cornford MacDonald, *The Republic of Plato*, Book 2, line 364c (Oxford University Press, 1966).
2. Liam Kofi-Bright, “White Psychodrama,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 31, no. 2 (2023): 198–221.
3. See James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Beacon Press, 1955).
4. Bright, “White Psychodrama,” 9.
5. See Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (A.G. McClurg & Co., 1903), 1.

6. See Wynter, “No Humans Involved, An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” *Forum N.H.I. Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 68.
7. See Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” 1.
8. See Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” 1.
9. Bright, “White Psychodrama,” 14.

Why Vote Third Party: The Abolitionist Case

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I wrote this essay during the 2024 U.S. presidential election, when it was unclear whether Kamala Harris or Donald Trump would win. Despite the example being out of date, I hope to have written an essay that remains relevant for the future.

1. A MORAL PRINCIPLE

Why would anyone consider voting for a third-party or an independent candidate? There are some not-so-good arguments for voting third party (or voting independent) and there are some decent ones. But one that rarely gets put forward and is rarely fleshed out in a meaningful way is the one I consider to be the most honest argument for voting third party. It is inspired by the insights of philosophers working in the Black Radical Tradition, folks like Huey Newton and Leonard Harris.¹

Initially, one might think that a proper defense of the third-party vote ought to start by defending the claim that it would be better if we had more political parties than just the two dominant parties. But that isn’t my starting point. Most people already agree that more democracy is better than less democracy. Specifically, most people who vote for the lesser of two evils (by which I mean either of the dominant parties) already acknowledge that there ought to be *more* viable political parties in the U.S.—at least more than two. All of us lament the fact that the presidential candidates of the Democratic and Republican Parties are the only candidates that have a viable chance of winning a presidential contest.

According to the “Ethicist,” Anthony Appiah, a philosopher and *New York Times* contributor, you should vote for a third-party candidate only if *neither* of the two major party candidates sufficiently represents your values.² For example, your values may align significantly if not perfectly well with Cornel West, the 2024 Justice for All candidate. If so, argues Appiah, you shouldn’t cast your vote for West simply on that basis. First, you must ask whether the Democratic or Republican candidate significantly approximates your values. Why ask this? Why not just vote your conviction? Well, because going the way of the third party means voting for a candidate that isn’t viable. What is problematic about that is that rather than casting a protest vote, which won’t impact the outcome of the election, you could have voted in a way that may have been impactful. You could have chosen to help one of the two viable candidates—Kamala Harris, say—win the election.

The reason why this is important is that the other viable candidate in the race—Donald Trump, in this example—is viable, too, and *you* would rather live in a world where Harris, not Trump, is the president. Your vote only makes a difference if it is cast in favor of one of the two major parties.

I don't disagree with the underlying principle of Appiah's argument. That principle asserts that *when choosing whom you will vote for, you ought to consider whether any of the viable candidates in the race approximates your values*. Those who go the way of the third party already *know* that Jill Stein and Cornel West (among other similarly positioned candidates) are not viable. They have already considered the two major candidates and concluded that neither of them sufficiently approximates their values. By Appiah's principle, then, it is reasonable to look for an alternative to the two major parties. Appiah acknowledges as much when he writes, "If you truly have no preference between the candidates you think might win, then casting a purely expressive vote is the obvious thing to do." Appiah's phrasing is misleading here. The issue is not whether you have a "preference" for Harris over Trump. The issue is whether your values align sufficiently enough with Harris rather than Trump. I prefer Harris over Trump, for example, but neither of these candidates sufficiently aligns with my values. With this clarification in place, I wholeheartedly endorse Appiah's moral principle.

2. A "PURELY EXPRESSIVE VOTE"?

Appiah characterizes going the way of the third party as "purely expressive," meaning that it accomplishes nothing and merely registers contempt or disagreement with the available presidential choices. But I think that that's false. An expressive vote, also known as a protest vote, does express one's contempt and/or disagreement. But it does more than that, or at least it can do more than that under the right circumstances. I would submit that voting third party strikes a blow to the two-party system and that it's long overdue that we challenge that system. This isn't all that different from a group of exploited workers that takes it upon itself to form a union at their company—against all odds of success. The challenge may be difficult and the prospects of success unlikely. But fighting for collective bargaining may still be the best option for the group of workers, even if it's not always the best option for some members of the group. And over time, the prospects of success may become increasingly more likely.

Voting for the Democrat or Republican candidate in the 2024 U.S. presidential election is not just a vote for a particular candidate. It is a vote for the electoral system. By voting for a major candidate, both of whom are committed to upholding the two-party system, you thereby contribute to the system's consolidation of political power. Will voting for Kamala Harris or Donald Trump, the viable candidates, perpetuate an unjust electoral system that is harmful to democracy, to the planet, and to various other issues we care deeply about? I think so. Both candidates are beholden to their billionaire and millionaire donors, and neither of them is advocating seriously to tackle the main existential crises facing Americans and the rest of the world. I am thinking of issues like climate change, ending

student debt, ending homelessness and poverty, ending the American war machine, etc. Some of these issues don't even come up in mainstream American political discourse because neither of the major parties has anything to say about them in their platforms—and the media is complicit in not querying about such issues. That Harris and Trump don't have much to offer on these issues is not a reason, by itself, for thinking that the two-party system is corrupt. But there is a very strong case others have made that the system is corrupt. For example, the main reason why the major parties (and their candidates) are beholden to their donors is that, for all practical purposes, it's impossible to get elected to the office of the president in the U.S. without having access to millions of dollars, which is required to execute a viable national campaign. Ads alone may cost millions of dollars. And that's just the beginning. Unfortunately, this is a structural feature of the two-party system. The two major parties could change this system (by, for example, turning to the public financing of elections or by significantly dialing back Super PAC contribution limits, etc.), but they're the ones pushing to maintain the status quo, or in some cases expanding the influence of money in politics. It is not an accident, therefore, that Harris and Trump are only willing to go as far as their donors are willing to let them. This is not a bug, but a feature of the two-party system itself.

Given this context, I propose to expand (or supplement) Appiah's moral principle as follows: *When choosing whom you will vote for in a presidential election cycle, you should consider whether voting for either of the viable candidates will contribute to consolidating the power of an extremely unjust and harmful electoral system that is likely to project the "lesser evil" dilemma into future presidential elections*. I am suggesting that the two-party system is rotten to its core. It is extremely unjust and harmful, not just to the excluded third-party candidates, but to the issues they bring to the table—that is, the existential issues we all care about. Among these existential issues is the issue of democracy. Specifically, I am thinking of the fact that voting for either of the two major candidates effectively guarantees that a lesser-of-two-evils-dilemma will arise every presidential election cycle. This problem is inherently bad for democracy! Restricting the scope of viable candidates to two corporate parties, I am suggesting, stifles our political discourse and restricts our vision of the politically possible. As long as we continue to reward the lesser evil with our vote, the two major parties, that prop up the two-party system, have little incentive to change the *structure* of elections. They might modify their views on other issues, but they won't dare talk about the political power structure. The two major parties continually offer up candidates who are only moderately different from one another or who are drastically different on a few carefully selected issues (such as reproductive health and immigration). Why should either of the major parties offer a radical solution to climate change, for example, if that will upset their donors? Why risk cutting off the hand that feeds them when the two parties know that the American public will vote for one of their candidates despite knowing their underwhelming approach to, for example, the climate crisis? They know they've got you. At one of her campaign events, Kamala Harris was interrupted by protestors of the ongoing crisis in

Gaza.³ She responded that if they don't like her view on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, they are effectively siding with Trump. By protesting her, she exclaimed, they were helping to elect Trump. What she clearly understands is that, if you have a slight preference for her over Trump, you'll vote for her *despite your values* for the simple reason that you know the other side's candidate is worse on this issue—an issue you obviously care deeply about if you care enough to protest. Voting for a major party candidate, then, means voting for the two-party system, which means perpetuating the lesser-of-two-evils-dilemma, which means perpetuating the exclusion of candidates who offer us serious solutions to the serious problems all of us are facing. In short, voting for the two-party system helps to sustain the misery and injustices we've grown accustomed to, which is the same misery that defenders of the two-party system (like Harris) frequently use to shame and extort third-party voters of their vote.

The reason to vote for an unviable third-party candidate this November is that we find ourselves trapped in a vicious cycle of "lesser evils." We need to get off the hamster wheel; running faster isn't going to help. We are limited in how we can fight back, but one option we do have is to protest the two-party system by refusing to go along with its rigged set of rules. In my view, the third-party strategy is laser focused on the fact of our entrapment rather than on the fact that Harris or Trump will win the 2024 election cycle. We remain ensnared—to our own demise—if we limit the scope of our moral concern to this particular election cycle. Rather than focus on the fact that one of the evils will end up in the White House come November, we would do better to take up what Tommy J. Curry calls a *futural perspective*.⁴ If we want a better *future*, we need to take steps *today* to challenge the conditions that create lesser-evil-dilemma scenarios. This includes building up third parties, among other things. The *presentist perspective*, by contrast, encourages you to remain focused on the present election and the next four years of the elected candidate's presidency. We have seen, however, that the presentist perspective is flawed because it guarantees that we'll be in the same situation four years from now. The futural perspective is harder to accept because it requires a huge sacrifice. You must be willing to give up the next four years to help build an alternative future. To use an analogy: If you are oppressed, don't vote for the benevolent oppressor—the less violent and more caring oppressor—over the malevolent oppressor. Instead, vote for neither of them, because both of them are oppressors. Vote instead for the person seeking to abolish the system of oppression. Of course, you shouldn't delude yourself into thinking that the abolitionist has a viable chance of winning *this election cycle*. But, in the future, the abolitionist might have a fighting chance, particularly if we refuse to help sustain the oppressive system today.

3. A "SPOILED" VOTE?

In short, by voting for a third-party or independent candidate in the 2024 U.S. presidential election, you not only "protest" the two major party candidates, you strike a blow (however small) to the unjust two-party system in its effort to further consolidate power. In short, one good reason to vote for a third-party or independent candidate

this November is to oppose the US's extremely unjust and harmful two-party system. We can take this "high road" without deluding ourselves into thinking that Cornel West (or whomever) will become the next president. That being said, we don't take the high road to feel righteous. That is how many would characterize those of us who proudly cast our "protest vote." The motivation behind the protest vote isn't to feel good and pat ourselves on the back for taking the moral high ground. One objection to *that* motivation is that you get to keep your feeling of moral righteousness while the most vulnerable of Americans are at risk of experiencing greater suffering if the greater evil ends up winning the election. "You must be so privileged to waste your vote on an unviable candidate," the opposition scoffs. "But what about the rest of us? We can't wait for the revolution; we need to make it past the next four years." I agree with the objector that the motivation of moral righteousness, if treated as an end in itself, is the height of arrogance. However, I reject the objector's framing of the issue in terms of a "wasted vote."

I want to address, in turn, the objections that it is a privilege to vote third party, and that it is a wasted vote. First, if someone truly feels that they might not make it through the next four years if, say, Trump is elected, and is therefore prepared to cast their vote for the lesser evil out of a sense of survival, those of us voting third party shouldn't berate or begrudge this voter. How much sacrifice any one of us can afford to make—how desperate we might feel—is a personal matter and momentous decision. Each one of us has to decide that for ourselves. Second, the issue I take is with those who insist on making that momentous decision for *all* of us by insisting that all rational persons *must* vote for the lesser evil. To them, I would turn the table on the charge of the privileged voter. First, it is not an act of privilege to merely recognize that (one of) the root causes of our impoverished state of our politics is that we have a corrupt two-party system. If that diagnosis is correct, then perhaps some of us are privileged enough to fight back against the corrupt two-party system rather than sacrifice our values for the lesser evil. But why is that a bad thing? Arguably, it is the person who is privileged enough to fight back but chooses to sacrifice their values—to achieve incremental progress on climate change, say—who is guilty of misappropriating their privilege. Perhaps it's the uncritical supporter of the two-party system who is at fault, because this individual has made a calculation that they can live with the crumbs given by the lesser evil rather than settle for no crumbs at all and instead participate in the long-term struggle to expand the scope of novel political possibilities that would better address our dire political problems at their root. Changing the system, after all, is the best way to help the *condition* of the most vulnerable.

A different objection to my position harkens back to Appiah's original concern. Recall that for him, the only thing you should consider when deciding who to vote for is whether the candidates you prefer are viable and whether and to what degree they align with your values. He thinks you should vote for the viable candidate that most aligns with your values (assuming there is one), without considering third-party or independent candidates that are not viable. The implication of this logic is that voting for an unviable

candidate is a wasted vote, or as Appiah euphemistically calls it, a “purely expressive vote.” What do we make of this argument? I have already said that, even on this logic, Appiah’s principle for going the way of the major parties isn’t met for many of us: that is to say, neither candidate’s platform *sufficiently* aligns with our values, even if one of these candidates approximates it more than the other.

But I now move on to the other issue, the idea that voters should settle for whatever they can get. At some point, when one’s values are grossly misaligned with all of the viable candidates, one must take a stand. To take an extreme hypothetical, if the choice is between Hitler 1.0 and Hitler 2.0, we shouldn’t necessarily settle for the “lesser evil” simply because that’s all we can get. At some point, we cross over the threshold that Appiah himself recognizes—insufficient alignment with our values. First, then, I reject the implicit premise or insinuation that one should *only* vote for a candidate if that candidate has a good chance of winning. There are sometimes compelling reasons to vote for a candidate that you know is destined to lose. A teacher casts a vote for the student she believes merits the distinguished student award *knowing* that, unfortunately for the student, she has absolutely no chance of winning. Did the teacher do something wrong by casting a vote for someone she knew would lose? No, of course not. She voted her heart because she felt this was the right choice—because she thought the vote was justified—not because she thought her vote was going to make a material difference, in the end. Her vote does, of course, increase the *likelihood* that the student she chose would win, just as voting for West makes him likelier to win than if you hadn’t voted for him. But the teacher isn’t delusional; she doesn’t think that voting for her non-viable candidate will make her *likely* to win. (Running away from a bear may increase my likelihood of surviving the encounter, but it may still be very unlikely that I will survive.) Therefore, the question before us is whether it is reasonable to vote for a presidential candidate you know will (in all likelihood) lose. I have argued that there is good reason to go the way of the third party because voting otherwise guarantees that we’ll be in the same predicament in future elections.

Second, I want to pause to consider the idea of a *wasted vote*. I offer two ways of understanding this notion, both of which run contrary to the depiction of third-party voting as a “waste” or pointless exercise. First, it is those voting for someone *they believe* is evil, albeit not as evil as the other major candidate, who are wasting their vote. For not only are they voting *against their own fundamental values and interests*, but they are voting to consolidate the power of the corrupt two-party system that will ensure they will continue to sacrifice their values in future presidential elections. Of course, they would not say that they are voting with the intention of propping up the two-party system. I believe them. But the question is not whether they intend this; the question is whether this will be the likely result of their choice. The *effect* of their voting for the lesser evil is that they help consolidate the power structure that produces the lesser-evil-dilemma (regardless of their intention). In my view, that is the truly wasted vote.

The second way to respond to the objection is to bite the bullet by acknowledging that, indeed, *every vote is a wasted vote under the current two-party system* because every one of our votes has been structured to consolidate the power of the two-party system in one way or another. That’s, of course, the whole point of rigging the system. For example, if you vote for a third-party candidate, you run the risk that Trump might be elected when you could have voted against him (thereby making it less likely that he wins). This is a feature, not a bug, from the perspective of the two major parties. This worry connects with a related objection that’s often raised in this context. That objection is that by voting for a third-party candidate, it doesn’t follow that you thereby oppose the unjust two-party system, because one of the two viable candidates—the Democrat or the Republican—might be an existential threat to democracy and having that person in office might be worse for democracy than perpetuating the two-party system. For example, Democrats argue that if Trump wins the election, he might undermine democracy itself. After all, he tried to steal the election through his “fake electors” scheme, culminating in the January 6 insurrection. He is likely to try doing so again if he’s elected for a second term. I don’t disagree that this is a serious concern. I want to give a three-part reply to this objection that takes this concern seriously.

The first thing to point out by way of reply is that if Trump wins, the two-party system wins. Similarly, if Harris wins, this too bolsters the two-party system. So, your vote and mine are “wasted” (one way or another) regardless of who wins. Our votes are wasted, that is, if our starting premise is that the two-party system is unjust and it would be better to have more parties and more political ideas on the table. The second thing to point out is that the conditions that created Trump will not go away if we vote for Harris and she ends up winning the election, because the effect is that this victory will consolidate the power of the two-party system that guarantees there will be lesser-evil-dilemmas in future elections. Thirdly, because the two major parties neglect many important issues, offer the American electorate crumbs that are inadequate to address the underlying problems, and fail to vigorously fight for the legislation they support (almost as if they don’t really want to see it passed), it is not surprising that much of the American citizenry sees politics as a waste of time and responds by refusing to vote at all. Others, however, turn to the demagogue in the race, the one pushing hate and vitriol, fear and grievance. The deterioration of political discourse opens the door to wannabe dictators with fascistic tendencies, people who are willing to scapegoat the most vulnerable populations and exploit the racist attitudes and xenophobic fears of a subset of American voters. That is to say, our vote can be considered “wasted” (or “spoiled”) from the perspective of one who would like *never* to see another *viable* fascistic or authoritarian candidate in American politics—a person who so brazenly opposes democratic rule that he’s willing to orchestrate a coup just to remain in power. We increase the likelihood of candidates *far worse* than Trump if we vote to consolidate the two-party system that produces the lesser-evil-dilemma. For then we do nothing to prevent it and everything to perpetuate it.

According to Appiah, one of the things that is not on the table this November is what voting system we ought to be voting under. He is absolutely correct that we have no say in shaping a more just voting system through our vote. Campaign finance reform is not on the table. Ranked-choice voting is not on the table. And so on. However, Appiah draws the wrong conclusion from this sobering reality. He forgets that the fact that we can't vote to adopt a new voting system is not an unlucky accident. It is not by accident that Harris and Trump haven't raised the issue of ranked choice voting or money in politics in their respective platforms. Their silence on issues that directly impact the political power structure is a feature, not a bug (or oversight). For one of the characteristics of structural violence is that it is "self-repairing."⁵ The reason why the major presidential candidates *never* give us the option of repairing the flawed two-party system is that the major parties have no interest in relinquishing their power. It is only if we, the voters, force them to give us the option to repair the system that any such solution would become part of the conversation. My point is that Appiah's argument is misleading; it ignores that by voting for the lesser evil we thereby ensure that we'll never be able to change the corrupt two-party system that precludes other political possibilities, including alternative voting systems that are fairer and inclusive of more ideas.

A defender of Appiah might reply as follows. Refusing to vote for either the Democrat or Republican does little to prevent the unjust and harmful two-party system from consolidating its power, since the two-party system doesn't require *your* vote, in particular, to persist. What the two-party system requires to conserve, or even enhance, its power is a majority of the electorate voting for either of the major candidates, which is what's going to happen regardless of whether *you* (or *I*) vote for one of them!

What do we make of this objection? Well, the critic isn't wrong to suggest that merely casting a protest vote will not change much at all. The word "merely" is doing a lot of work here, however. Merely voting means that no other form of political resistance is going on. It also means that you are acting alone in voting against the two-party system. A corollary of this argument is that *only if a significant number of us vote against the two-party system* will a protest vote pose a serious threat to power. Once again, the critic of the third-party vote would have us draw the wrong conclusion from this depressing fact.

The real upshot of this argument is that we ought to organize and protest collectively rather than as isolated, disgruntled voters. Merely casting a protest vote will not change anything. Similarly, organized movements will not change anything if they are relatively small, as is the case with the "Abandon Harris" movement in the present election. Speaking realistically, today, we have no chance of electing Jill Stein or any other candidate this November. The socialist and former member of the Seattle City Council, Kshama Sawant, is right about that. It's not going to happen, because there aren't enough people *right now* that are well organized against the two-party system (at least, if the polls are correct). But it doesn't follow that these movements are useless, insignificant, or not worth creating and growing. Notice that I began this essay by

acknowledging that we should not operate from a position of wishful thinking. Unfortunately, candidates like Jill Stein and Cornel West often operate from exactly this place of wishful thinking. When asked if they have a viable chance of winning, they typically say that they do. But they are wrong. They stand no chance of winning, unfortunately.⁶ My argument has been that, as powerless as we are, we have some power. We have some agency. We have the agency not to willfully perpetuate a system that is hell bent on keeping us powerless. We can at least organize others to vote against the two-party system. Hence, we shouldn't just vote third party. We should do so in conjunction with building a movement if we're truly sick and tired of being sick and tired. That movement won't be sufficiently strong by this November, unfortunately. But if our outlook is futural rather than presentist—that is, if our goal is to build a strong movement for the future rather than to get our weakly preferred candidate elected this election cycle—the resistance must begin today. To get off of the hamster wheel of the lesser-evil-dilemma, we must be willing to vote against the lesser and greater evils. If we can hold out as much, and if we organize in the meantime, then, *at some point in the future*, we will have the numbers necessary to collectively stand against our political oppressors on both sides of the political aisle. Imagine that—a political system in which we could actually vote for what we want and what the planet and the rest of the world direly needs!

That, to me, is a compelling reason to vote third party.

NOTES

1. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition (Penguin, 2009), 192–210. Leonard Harris, "Insurrectionist Ethics: Advocacy, Moral Psychology, and Pragmatism," in *Ethical Issues for a New Millennium*, ed. John Howie, The Wayne Leys Memorial Lectures (Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).
2. Anthony Appiah, "Is It OK to Vote for My Third-Party Fave This Presidential Election?" *The New York Times*, September 4, 2024, accessed November 4, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/04/magazine/third-party-voting-election-ethics.html>.
3. Rebecca Davis O'Brien, "'I Am Speaking Now': At a Rally in Detroit, Harris Stares Down Her Detractors," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2024, accessed November 4, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/08/us/politics/harris-rally-gaza-protesters.html>.
4. Tommy Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Temple University Press, 2017), 181–87.
5. Elena Ruíz, *Structural Violence: The Makings of Settler Colonial Impunity* (Oxford University Press, 2024).
6. At the time of writing, movements like "Abandon Harris" that advocate voting third-party appear to have an opportunity to "swing the election." This is the goal of Kshama Sawant's grassroots movement, Workers Strike Back, which has officially endorsed Jill Stein for President. They are organizing the Arab and Muslim population in places like Michigan to deny Harris an electoral victory in the swing states. Given my argument, if they were to be successful in their goal, that would be a good thing. The "good thing" isn't that Trump would win; that is a decidedly bad thing. The good thing is the formation of an organized Arab-Muslim coalition against the two-party system. This in turn would contribute to building a strong resistance movement and an alternative political party. Bernard Tamas argues that "most successful third parties in U.S. politics don't typically rise to dominance but instead challenge the major parties enough to force them to change course" (Jessica Pope, "VSU's Bernard Tamas Considered Top Expert on Third Parties in U.S. Politics," August 25, 2022, accessed November 4, 2024, <https://www.valdosta.edu/about/news/releases/2022/08/vsus-bernard-tamas-considered-top-expert-on-third-parties-in-u.s.->

[politics.php](#)). However, rather than fizzling out after a successful challenge, the goal ought to be to use the political momentum of grassroots movements to expand the resistance effort.

Good Practices for Improving Representation in Philosophy Departments

Women in Philosophy / Demographics in Philosophy Group

PREFACE

The following “Good Practices” document was developed by the Women in Philosophy / Demographics in Philosophy group under the directorship of Nicole Hassoun, with substantial contributions from co-directors, advisory board members, and collaborators from 2018 to 2024. It is the result of extensive feedback and discussion from many sources including: two large panel discussions at Pacific APA meetings in 2018–2019; email queries to a large number of journal editors and department heads from 2019 to 2023; the creators of the British Philosophical Association’s Good Practice Scheme;¹ referees and editors at *Ethics* which published a portion of it in 2022; blog readers at the Blog of the APA, Daily Nous, and The Splintered Mind; several committees of the American Philosophical Association; and numerous informal exchanges with members of the profession. In 2023, a version of it was endorsed by the APA’s Committee on Inclusiveness in the Profession.

One thing that has become clear over the course of many discussions is that almost every thoughtful reader will find something to object to in the document—some positions expressed too strongly or not strongly enough, some recommendations overly detailed or insufficiently detailed, some underrepresented groups given too much relative focus or too little relative focus. This document is the compromise result of many hands, and we hope that philosophers who are broadly supportive of diversity and inclusion will find value in it even if those compromises haven’t all landed exactly where they prefer.

We intend this to be a living document open to revision in future years. Suggestions are welcome to demphilproj@gmail.com.

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The Demographics in Philosophy/Women in Philosophy² project proposes the following guidelines for inclusion with

influence to promote, within the philosophical community, practices that will, if adopted, create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all—including women, people of color, disabled people, non-native English speakers, first-generation college students, those with serious economic needs or from developing countries, LGBTQ+ people, and people with political or religious views that are underrepresented in the discipline, amongst others. We hope these suggestions will act as a starting point for improving the conditions for everyone in our discipline. The following guidelines promote equal opportunities for underrepresented groups in philosophy and support and encourage academic excellence of all kinds.

Guidelines:

- **Hiring, Retention, and Promotion**
- **Teaching**
- **Harassment and Academic Staff-Student Relationships**
- **Caregivers**
- **Research Projects**
- **Learned Societies**
- **Journals**

ADOPTION OF GOOD PRACTICES: PROCEDURE³

Where a department or organization adopts a particular Good Practice, the Head of Department or chair of a learned society, lead journal editor, etc. is requested to formally document the adoption in the minutes of the meeting at which the decision is taken.

We recognize that some of the recommended policies are impractical in some contexts and controversial among those who agree with the overall spirit of this document. Adopting these Good Practices does not require agreeing with every point in the document, as long as disagreement is adequately justified and documented. We recognize that there is substantial legitimate diversity of opinion about policies of the sort described. We hope that the process of considering these guidelines will lead to fruitful discussion and progress toward better implementation of equity and diversity goals. Nothing in the document should be interpreted as taking precedence over applicable legal requirements.

WHAT COUNTS AS “ADOPTING” A GOOD PRACTICE?

1. The recommendations vary in their degree of specificity and are open to different interpretations. In some cases, there is considerable flexibility in how the recommendation might be implemented. Where suggested courses of action are especially controversial or difficult to implement, the practice is only to *consider* a possible course of action. In such cases, adherence to this document requires only careful consideration of the advisability or feasibility of the practice. Simply *deciding* to implement the recommendations does **not** constitute *adoption* of the relevant Good Practice. There must be a clear plan for actual implementation, including a timetable and specification of particular courses of action that will be taken (e.g., revising handbooks, adding training sessions, or assigning a particular role to a member of staff,

etc). The department or organization should deem itself to have “adopted” the relevant practice only at the point where a clear plan has been drawn up. This must include a timetable for implementation (e.g., where information in student handbooks cannot be altered until the start of the next academic year).

2. We recommend that, where a department wishes to adopt a Good Practice in the sense described above, the department head takes the bullet-pointed list of recommendations and supplements each bullet point with a clear list of changes or activities that the department intends to carry out in order to implement the recommendation, together with a clear timetable for completion. They may, of course, wish to delegate this task to the chair of a sub-committee—perhaps involving student and TA representatives. The resulting document should be approved at a departmental meeting and made available to all relevant people (including administrative staff and teaching assistants where appropriate), so that it is easy to check whether the department has kept to its timetable and, thereafter, is continuing to adhere to its own policy.

3. Once everything on the timetable has been implemented, provisions should be made for an annual review to ensure that the implemented policies remain in place and have not intentionally or unintentionally lapsed. This could take the form of a standing item on a departmental meeting agenda once a year, for example.

4. We appreciate that not all groupings of philosophers have any formal status (as a “department” or “discipline area,” etc.), and that departments are bound by their own institutions’ existing policies and procedures. Hence there may be some recommendations that a particular department or group lacks the power either (a) to formally endorse or (b) to implement. In such cases, the group in question will be deemed to subscribe to the practice if (re (a)) it has ensured that the practice adopted is known and informally agreed upon by all members of the group, or (re (b)) it has adopted as many of the Good Practice recommendations as it reasonably can, given any impediments posed by its institutional constraints or lack of formal status.

5. We recognize that larger interdisciplinary units sometimes contain groupings of philosophers. Either the grouping of the philosophers alone (insofar as this is possible for a non-departmental group; see (4) above) or the entire interdisciplinary unit can decide to adopt the policies. In either case, it should be made clear in all documentation.

6. In implementing these guidelines, special care should be taken not to overburden faculty, staff, or students from underrepresented groups, and they should not be compelled to speak as token representatives for the groups to which they are perceived as belonging.

7. We encourage organizations or departments who officially adopt these Good Practices to contact the Demographics in Philosophy Project at demphilproj@gmail.com. If sufficiently many departments or organizations agree to adopt these Good Practices, we might—but only with the explicit permission of those departments or

organizations—list them on the website as having adopted the Good Practices.

A NOTE ON DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Many of the recommendations involve informing relevant people about policies, procedures, etc. Wherever possible, the information should be easily accessible, and the relevant people should be directly notified via an appropriate medium. We request that departments think carefully about how the relevant information is transmitted to colleagues, students, staff, and other stakeholders. In general, including information in staff, student and teaching assistant handbooks is desirable but not sufficient. In the case of learned societies, some information will need to be transmitted to applicants for conference funding and to conference organizers.

GOOD PRACTICE POLICY: HIRING, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION⁴

1. Departments should ensure that members of hiring panels
 - a. are aware of the federal, state, and university-level laws and policies governing affirmative action and discrimination in hiring and promotion,
 - b. abide by those laws and policies,
 - c. know about the workings of bias.
2. Diversify hiring and tenure committees to include people from underrepresented groups. For example:
 - a. Appoint a diversity officer who will be responsible for ensuring each applicant is reviewed equitably. This person should have a clearly defined role that empowers them to intervene and sets out a clear procedure for addressing any issues they identify. Where possible, this person should have expertise on these issues and should make use of available training.
 - b. Ensure that hiring panels (at both shortlisting and interview stages) include at least one, and preferably more than one, member of an underrepresented group, unless there are exceptional practical reasons why this is impossible. But they should be aware that the presence of underrepresented groups on the panel on its own will not correct for bias.
 - c. Commit to inclusion with influence—members of underrepresented groups should not function merely as tokens but have due influence on decision-making, including in leadership positions. However, also be cautious about creating disproportionate burdens on members of underrepresented groups and offer appropriate remuneration

- and recognition, and compensatory release from other types of service.
- d. Departments should strive to allow sufficient time for non-rushed consideration of job applications.
 - e. Evaluate whether it is feasible and desirable to anonymize parts of their hiring process (e.g., by considering anonymized CVs, cover letters, and/or writing samples).
3. When evaluating department needs, consider what constitutes a “well-rounded” department, whether it might include topics, approaches, interests, and philosophical traditions that have been neglected but deserve representation.
 - a. Recognize that references to specialized areas of philosophy that emphasize diversity (e.g., LGBTQ philosophy, philosophy of race, philosophy of disability) as “fringe/peripheral philosophy,” “not real philosophy,” and the like are stigmatizing to members of those groups. If your department is unfamiliar with a desired research area, reach out to experts in other philosophy departments, or in other disciplines, for feedback on assessing candidates. (The APA’s UPDirectory⁵ can be a valuable resource in this regard.)
 - b. Attend to your regional context as well as the overall global context (e.g., the importance of including adequate geographical and indigenous representation in your department).
 4. Hire faculty using approaches and evaluation methods that encourage and appropriately value applicants who would contribute to your department’s diversity.
 - a. When feasible, advertise positions in areas likely to attract a wide diversity of applicants.
 - b. When feasible, include language in the job description signaling interest in applicants who contribute to the department’s diversity.
 - c. Encourage applications from diverse candidates. This might include reaching out to people in diversity-relevant venues such as the UPDirectory and other diversity-focused blogs and associations.
 - d. Use clear criteria of evaluation that minimize the likelihood of bias and favoritism.
 - e. Do not assume that teaching and research conducted by people from an underrepresented group will focus on areas related to their own group.
 5. Agree in advance about what the department is looking for when hiring new faculty to avoid sources of bias.
 - a. Evaluate whether your conception of “core philosophy” and/or the mission of your philosophy program needs updating and discuss what you are looking for in a “good candidate.” These definitions should include expectations about, for example, the number and quality of publications to prevent holding different applicants to different standards.
 - b. Consider the feasibility and desirability of developing clear and explicit guidelines in advance about, e.g., number and quantity of publications, the weighting of different items in the job description.
 - c. Ensure that any non-anonymous parts of the review process do not omit, or unfairly disadvantage, applicants from underrepresented groups.
 - d. Consider the feasibility and desirability of requiring candidates to remove references to their degree-granting institution(s) to reduce prestige bias.
 - e. Re-evaluate applications near the end of the process to determine whether bias has played a role in excluding or downgrading some applicants.
 6. In evaluating scholars who work on underrepresented topics or traditions, employ appropriate standards of prestige and impact.
 - a. Have a clear understanding of what counts as the top journals or conferences in the subfield relating to the applicant’s speciality.
 - b. Remember that top specialty journals for some subfields, such as philosophy of disability and LGBTQ philosophy, tend to be newer and thus less ‘prestigious’ in terms of impact factor, circulation, etc., and that devaluing publications in those journals may further disadvantage and stigmatize people working in those subfields. Also bear in mind that, internationally, highly qualified philosophers often publish in journals that are not available internationally or in English. Publishing venue choices can be philosophically significant (for example, when South African philosophers publish in Xhosa rather than English to avoid using a colonial language).
 - c. Focus on the quality of the applicant’s work, how interesting or relevant it is to their sub-specialty, and how it might broaden the department’s research and curriculum.

- d. Consider the extent to which uptake by policy-makers, the general public, and scholars in other academic departments are forms of impact that should be valued in hiring and promotion. Scholars in underrepresented topics and traditions sometimes have impacts outside of mainstream academic philosophy that are inappropriately disregarded.
7. Consider giving diversity-related contributions significant weight when evaluating colleagues and applicants.
 - a. Remember that being a member of an underrepresented group in philosophy can require additional labor, burdens, stressors, and expectations, which is often not recognized. Note also that philosophers might have cultural, political, or familial obligations at times and in ways unfamiliar to philosophers in mainstream Anglophone institutions; obligations like these should not be held against a candidate.
 - b. Remember that philosophers from underrepresented groups are often expected to take on a disproportionate amount of service work in addition to their research.
 - c. Evaluate whether permitting or requiring diversity statements would be useful.
 8. During the search process make efforts so that the process is as equitable as possible.
 - a. Advocate for a fully inclusive application process, including with online systems. For example, ensure the options for gender are more than “male/female” or “man/woman” as this excludes non-binary candidates and fails to distinguish transgender candidates from cisgender ones.
 - b. When arranging interviews and visits, ask all candidates about their accommodation needs.
 - c. Conducting interviews online can disadvantage candidates without access to good technical facilities. To the extent possible, try to support such candidates without such access, e.g., by providing funding to use commercial facilities for the interview.
 - d. During the campus visit, ensure that arrangements have been made to the extent possible for candidates with disabilities and other needs (e.g., that locations are accessible, printed material is in large print, child care and nursing accommodations are available, that the exercise of religious practices is possible, etc.).
 - e. Promotions committees/Heads of Department should, where consistent with institutional policy, ask for CVs from all eligible department members, rather than inviting specific members of staff to apply or only considering those who put themselves forward.
 9. Faculty should recognize that there is a big power asymmetry between non-tenure track faculty and other members of the faculty and staff. In light of this, tenured faculty need to treat untenured faculty and non-academic staff with the utmost respect and keep in mind that things that may not be important to tenured faculty (e.g., saying something critical or not being compensated for extra-contractual work) can be very serious for non-tenured track faculty and non-academic staff.
 10. Generally, departments should make an effort to support non-tenure track (NTT) faculty as researchers (e.g., invite NTT faculty to give talks to the department, offer them conference travel and research funding, assign NTT faculty to teach in their areas of expertise whenever possible.)
 11. Develop formal policies for managing the needs of diverse groups.
 - a. Work to make sure appropriate disability-related accommodations are in place and updated as needed.
 - b. Support mentoring and provide support networks for people you hire from underrepresented groups.
 - c. Consider having a yearly diversity workshop or training available for faculty and make faculty aware of relevant resources.
 - d. Learn about the issues that underrepresented colleagues typically face so that you can advocate more effectively with colleagues for faculty retention and promotion.
 12. Departments should ensure that those involved in the promotions and appraisal processes know about the workings of bias.
 13. Student evaluations of teaching are frequently used to evaluate faculty teaching in US institutions. However, evidence suggests that their use is problematic in several ways—one of which is that students tend to offer lower evaluations to women and members of other underrepresented groups. Therefore, relying on student evaluations as the primary measure of teaching effectiveness can systematically disadvantage faculty from underrepresented groups. Given this:
 - a. Departments should avoid using student evaluations to compare individual faculty members to each other or to a department average and might instead consider them as

a way to observe patterns in an instructor's feedback over time.

- b. Provide the interpretative context for any quantitative scores, such as distributions, sample sizes, and response rates for each question on the instrument.
 - c. Interpret and use student evaluations as part of a holistic assessment of teaching effectiveness.⁶
 - d. Consider other methods for evaluating teaching, such as peer observations, reviews of teaching materials, instructor self-reflections, evaluations of student performance, enrollment figures, individual supervision and mentorship, involvement with study abroad or undergraduate research, organizing workshops, support of student events, and other contributions to the educational mission of the university.
14. Tenure-track faculty members should be clearly informed by designated members of faculty of all criteria for tenure and promotion, including any special requirements applicable within a department or a college.
 - a. The designated member of the faculty should clearly explain to every tenure-track faculty member the standards for reappointment and tenure and the cycle for evaluations of their progress in meeting these requirements.
 - b. New faculty members should meet the designated member of the faculty regularly—ideally at least once a year—to discuss progress and places where improvement is needed.
 - c. Periodic evaluations should be candid and expressed in plain English. They should include specific examples illustrating the quality of performance, constructive criticism of any potential areas for improvement, and practical guidance for future efforts.
 - d. The department's focus should be to evaluate the candidate's research, teaching, and service. The faculty's evaluations should address these questions clearly listing specific examples.
 15. Institutions should adopt a consistent approach to handling private letters and conversations, outside the normal review process, concerning the merits of a tenure candidate.
 16. Faculty and administrators must treat an unsuccessful tenure candidate with professionalism, decency, and compassion, and colleagues should take care not to isolate the person socially. Active efforts to assist the candidate in relocating to another position redound to the mutual benefit of the individual and the institution.
 17. The faculty, administration, and governing board should strive for consistency in the operation of the institution's tenure and promotion evaluation processes.
 - a. Tenure and promotion decisions must be consistent over time among candidates with different personal characteristics—such as race, gender, disability, and national origin.
 - b. Institutional policies should list the types of discrimination that the institution prohibits.
 - c. Reviewers at each level, from the department to the ultimate decision maker, should ask, "How does this candidate compare to others we have evaluated in the recent past?"
 18. Officially adopt and implement these diversity-promoting practices to move from good intentions to good practice.
 - a. Widely publicize your department's goals or targets and commitment to promoting diversity.
 - b. Inform all department members and bind future department members to uphold these standards.
 - c. Publicly and explicitly adopt diversity-promoting practices, helping to create a culture of concern that enhances the department's reputation for welcoming diversity, attracting more diverse applicants.
 - d. Consider creating a committee to collect data on diversity-relevant hiring and promotion practices, e.g., applicant and hiring rates for members of underrepresented groups, tenure and retention rates, hiring committee composition, etc., and track progress in increasing diversity in your department.
 - i. If this is done, store this data in a way that will be available to the department over time, possibly with the help of the administrative offices supporting the department's academic unit.
 - e. Evaluate progress at regular intervals and revise practices accordingly.
 - i. Where possible, obtain the help of external reviewers in evaluating this progress.

- ii. Revise your practices until you adopt practices that work for your university and department context.
- iii. Where possible, work with researchers to isolate and implement evidence-based practices that increase diversity in academic philosophy departments.

GOOD PRACTICE: TEACHING⁷

The aim of these practices is to make teaching effective and inclusive. With this aim in mind, the following guidelines focus on classroom dynamics and management in order to foster a sense of community in the classroom conducive to learning and critical and creative thinking. Departments should encourage instructors to implement the following guidelines where feasible:

- 1. Aim to improve the diversity of class syllabi. Online resources, colleagues, and the students themselves may have valuable suggestions.⁸
- 2. Departments should ensure that those involved in teaching know about the workings of bias.
- 3. When feasible, permit students to introduce themselves. Try to remember their names (with correct pronunciation) and any personal pronouns they choose to disclose and expect their classmates to do the same.
 - a. Do not require students to disclose their personal pronouns, disabilities, etc., as this unfairly “outs” students and places them at risk of marginalization.
- 4. Treat students as individuals and not as representatives of a category, e.g., “LGBTQ,” “African.” Do not assume that the person’s place of origin, for example, makes them an expert on that particular place.
- 5. Seek participation from everyone and encourage those who are more hesitant. Give everyone a chance to talk.
 - a. If a student asks a question showing advanced knowledge, give other participants the background knowledge required to understand the discussion.
 - b. Encourage questions of clarification.
 - c. Try to ensure jokes, thought experiments, and examples are intelligible to the whole class, and not only a subgroup within the class, explaining as necessary.
 - d. Try a variety of teaching techniques and classroom activities to stimulate class discussion and to encourage student participation in ways that everyone is comfortable with (e.g., some students struggle with speaking in front of the entire class but do well in small groups).
- 6. Encourage students to address each other thus fostering politeness and collaboration in class.
 - a. Encourage students to listen carefully to their interlocutor.
 - b. Encourage students to help each other in class to develop ideas, contribute their knowledge, and so on.
 - c. Make sure that students are respectful and courteous.
 - d. Quickly address language that is insensitive, dismissive, aggressive or rude.
 - e. Aim to create an environment in which students can discuss their experiences and identities without being treated as though those experiences and identities solely define them.
- 7. Ensure that students are informed about available services for students (e.g., counseling, disabilities, studying support).
- 8. Try to ensure that all aspects of the class are accessible to everyone—for instance, that classrooms are big enough and accessible by wheelchair, that there are captions in videos, that extra time and private rooms are available for students who need them during exams.
- 9. Encourage feedback on the class and involve students in suggesting ways to improve it.
- 10. In graduate student mentoring, to the extent possible avoid creating the impression that departments or advisors have students who are “favorites” on any grounds other than objective merit, especially if such favoritism appears to disadvantage students from traditionally underrepresented groups.
- 11. To the extent possible, aim to give dissertation students prompt feedback on chapters, prospectuses, and other work, so as not to unnecessarily delay their progress. Needless

delays disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable and financially insecure students.

12. In graduate student placement, ensure that the placement officer is familiar with issues that candidates from underrepresented groups, and especially candidates with disabilities, face.
 - a. Meet early and often with students and encourage students to talk about these issues while ensuring that everyone is aware of how to report problems in these areas.
 - b. Consider creating a team of placement mentors covering a range of sub-disciplines.
 - c. Maintain a collection of job search materials that are accessible to all graduate students.
 - d. Make available to students resources that can enable them to have effective electronic interviews (e.g., rooms for interviewing with high-speed internet connection).
 - e. When feasible, provide financial support to students who need resources to lessen the financial burden of the job market (traveling, dossier services, child-care etc.).

GOOD PRACTICE: HARASSMENT AND ACADEMIC STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS⁹

Sexual and gender-based harassment can be carried out by persons of any sex or gender, and persons of any gender may be victims. Although harassment of students by academic and non-academic staff is often the focus of discussions, departments need to be aware that power differentials of this sort are not essential to sexual or gender-based harassment. Departments should also be aware that such harassment may interact with and be modified by issues of race, ethnicity, religion, class and disability status.

There is good evidence that the proportion of incidents of sexual, gender-based, and other forms of harassment that get reported, even informally, in philosophy departments is very low. We therefore urge even those staff who do not believe that harassment is a problem in their own departments to give serious consideration to the recommendations below.

The US defines “sexual harassment” as unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:¹⁰

1. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person’s employment.
2. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting that person.

3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Institutional definitions of “sexual harassment” differ greatly from one another. Some institutional definitions focus solely on sexual conduct, while others also include non-sexual harassment related to sex or gender.

While departments need to attend to their institution’s definition of “sexual harassment,” and to make use of institutional procedures where appropriate, this is not the end of their responsibilities. Where sexist or inappropriate sexual behavior is taking place that contributes to an unwelcoming environment, departments should act on whether or not formal procedures are possible or appropriate.

Note that while “sexual harassment” is clearly codified, some aspects of gender-based harassment, which tends to involve the inferiorization or humiliation of another person based on that person’s gender, are less well discussed but are nonetheless important to eliminate when they arise. The same holds for other forms of harassment based on race, culture, disability, or other features that might single a person out for inferiorization or humiliation.

More broadly defined, sexual or gender-based harassment involves conduct of a sexual nature, or conduct related to sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Sexual and gender-based harassment are not limited to one-to-one interactions but can include generally inappropriate behavior directed towards a group of people. Political or ideological disagreements alone do not constitute sexual or gender-based harassment.

GENERAL POLICIES ON SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT¹¹

1. All members of the department—undergraduates, graduate students, academic and non-academic staff—should be made aware of the regulations that govern sexual harassment in their university including requirements for mandated reporters.
 - a. In particular, they should know the university’s definition of “sexual harassment” and whom to contact in possible cases of sexual harassment.
 - b. They should also know who has standing to file a complaint (in general, and contrary to widespread belief, the complainant need not be the victim).
 - c. They should be made aware of both formal and informal measures available at their university.
 - d. Departments should include this information in induction sessions for both students and staff and in training for teaching assistants.

2. Where the University or Faculty has a list of Harassment Contacts, all staff and students should be made aware of it and this information should be both online and posted in a public space. If no such list exists, the department should consider suggesting this approach to the university. It is very important for department members to be able to seek advice outside their department.
3. All members of staff should be familiar with how to deal with individuals who approach them to discuss a particular incident.
4. All of the information listed above should be made permanently available to staff and students, e.g., through a stable URL on the department website and/or staff and student handbooks, rather than only in the form of a one-off email communication.
5. The department head and others with managerial responsibilities (e.g., Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies) should ensure that they have full knowledge of university procedures regarding sexual harassment.

DEPARTMENTAL CULTURE

1. Seriously consider the harms of an atmosphere rife with derogatory or sexualizing, racializing, etc., comments and behavior, and address these should they arise.
2. Cultivate—from the top down—an atmosphere in which maintaining a healthy climate for all department members, especially those from underrepresented groups and including non-academic staff, is considered everyone's responsibility. At a minimum, this includes a responsibility to reflect on the consequences, intended or otherwise, of one's own behavior towards people from underrepresented groups. It may also include a responsibility to intervene, either formally or informally.
3. Ensure that those raising concerns about sexual and other forms of harassment are, as far as possible, protected against retaliation and that all those who are accused receive due process.
 - a. Report concerns about retaliation to the Department Chair, the Title IX Office.
4. Offer bystander training either to faculty, staff, and graduate students, if this is available or can be made available by the institution. This can help bystanders to feel comfortable intervening when they witness harassing behavior.

STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS¹²

Romantic or sexual relationships that occur in the student-teacher context, or in the context of supervision and evaluation, present special problems. The difference in power, respect, and trust typically present between a teacher and student, supervisor and subordinate, or senior

and junior colleague in the same department or unit makes these relationships especially vulnerable to exploitation. They can also have unfortunate unintentional consequences.

Such relationships can also generate perceived, and sometimes real, inequalities that affect other members of the department, whether students or staff. For example, a relationship between a senior and junior member of staff may raise issues concerning promotion, granting of sabbatical leave, or allocation of teaching. This may happen even if no preferential treatment actually occurs, and even if the senior staff member in question is not directly responsible for such decisions. In the case of staff-student relationships, questions may arise concerning preferential treatment in seminar discussions, marking, decisions concerning graduate student funding, and so on. Again, these questions may well emerge and be of serious concern to other students even if no preferential treatment actually occurs.

At the same time, we recognize that such relationships do indeed occur, that they need not be damaging, and may be both significant and long-lasting.

We suggest that departments adopt the following policy with respect to the behavior of members of staff at all levels, including graduate student instructors.

Please note that the recommendations below are not intended to be read legalistically. Individual institutions may have their own policies, and these will constitute formal requirements on staff and student behavior. The recommendations below are intended merely as departmental norms, and to be adopted only where not in conflict with institutional regulations.

GENERAL POLICIES ON STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The department's policy on relationships between staff and students (and between staff) should be clearly advertised to all staff and students in a permanent form, e.g., websites or staff/student handbooks. The policy should include clear guidance about whom students or staff might consult if problems (real or perceived) arise.

STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

1. Staff and graduate student teaching assistants should be informed that relationships between teaching staff and undergraduates or between faculty and graduate students are strongly discouraged, for the reasons given above. Some institutions might regard a zero-tolerance policy as reasonable, at least for certain types of relationships, and the language below is not meant to undercut that.
2. If such a relationship does occur, the member of staff in question should:
 - a. inform a senior member of the department—where possible, the department head, as soon as possible;

- b. withdraw from all supervision and small-group teaching involving that student (in the case of teaching assistants, this may involve swapping tutorial groups with another TA), unless practically impossible;
 - c. withdraw from the assessment of that student, even if anonymous marking is used.
 - d. withdraw from writing references and recommendations for the student in question.
 - e. withdraw from making any decisions (e.g., distribution of funding) where preferential treatment of the student could in principle occur.
3. It should be made clear to staff and students that if a student has entered into a relationship with a member of staff (including a TA), while the responsibility for taking the above steps lies with the member of staff concerned, the student is equally entitled to report their relationship to another member of staff (e.g., Head of Department, if appropriate), and to request that the above steps be taken.
 4. As much as possible, the department should encourage a practice of full disclosure in the case of such relationships' continuance. This avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest, as well as embarrassment for others.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF

Between members of academic staff where there is a large disparity in seniority (e.g., Associate Professor/Lecturer; Head of Department/Assistant Professor):

1. Disclosure of any such relationship should be strongly encouraged, in order to avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest.
2. Any potential for real or perceived conflicts of interest should be removed by, e.g., removal of the senior member of staff from relevant decision-making (e.g., promotions, appointment to permanent positions).

GOOD PRACTICE: CAREGIVERS¹³

Staff members and students with caregiving responsibilities—whether parental or other care obligations—face constraints on their time that others often do not. Such constraints often impose significant difficulties on the caregiver and requests for accommodation should be taken seriously; this should include accommodations allowing staff members to fulfill culturally necessitated caregiving duties. There are simple measures that departments can take to minimize the extent to which caregivers are disadvantaged.

GENERAL POLICIES

Departments should adopt an explicit policy concerning caregivers, which covers as many of the following points as is practically possible:

1. Schedule important events, as far as possible, between 9 and 5 (the hours when childcare is more available). When an event must be scheduled outside of these hours, give plenty of advance notice so that caregivers can make the necessary arrangements. Consider using online scheduling polls to find times that work for as many of those with caregiving obligations and provide the option of virtual attendance.
2. Consider requests from staff of any background for part-time and flexible working. (This is largely, but not exclusively, an issue for caregivers—requests from non-caregivers should also be considered.) Also be receptive, as far as possible, to requests for leave.
3. As far as possible, account for caregiving commitments when scheduling teaching responsibilities.
4. Be aware that students, not just staff, may have caregiving responsibilities. Have a staff contact person for students who are caregivers.
5. Ensure that students and staff are made fully aware of any university services for caregivers.
6. Ensure that staff have an adequate understanding of what caregiving involves (e.g., do not expect a PhD student to make progress on dissertating while on parental leave).
7. Ensure that parental leave funds provided by the university are actually used to cover for parental leave, rather than being absorbed into department or faculty budgets.
8. Those involved in performance evaluations should be fully informed about current policies regarding reduced teaching, research, and service expectations for caregivers, and take caregiving responsibilities into account where possible.

GOOD PRACTICE: CONFERENCES AND EVENTS¹⁴

1. As a session chair, ensure that the discussion is welcoming and inclusive. Consider implementing the following policies:
 - a. Keep a question queue and stick to it.
 - b. Step in where needed to help avoid, e.g., interruptions of those speaking, lines of discussion that are stretching on for too long, or dialogue that has become aggressive and/or rude.

- c. Allow for a break between talks and Q&A sessions in order for participants to gather their thoughts and/or to have time to attend to their different needs.
 - d. Carefully select the order in which you call on questioners. Beginning the Q&A session with student questions or a question from a member of an underrepresented group can lead to a more inclusive discussion.
 - e. Encourage the participation of those who might be slower to raise their hand or less assertive about getting to the front of the queue.
 - f. Do not allow questioners to ask multiple questions or extensive follow-up questions if others have not been given a chance to speak.
2. As an audience member, be respectful of the speaker and the other people in the room in some of the following ways:
- a. Keep questions short. Avoid asking multiple questions or long follow-up questions if this risks crowding others out of the conversation.
 - b. Try to ask constructive questions that will help the presenter. Set a respectful tone.
 - c. Try to read the room and assess whether your question will benefit the discussion.
3. As an organizer, take every reasonable step to make the conference as inclusive as possible.
- a. Organizers of recurring conferences should annually, or biennially, monitor the demographics of conference participants, and, if significant imbalances emerge in demographic representation, take steps to address the imbalance.
 - b. When drawing up a list of potential invited speakers, take reasonable steps to ensure sufficient representation of speakers from underrepresented groups.
 - c. Where possible, consult invited speakers before fixing the date of the conference, to increase the likelihood that they are not just invited but will actually be able to accept the invitations.
 - d. Organizers should ensure that members of all groups are treated equally as speakers on publicity material and the conference program (e.g., to avoid the situation where a White speaker is described as "Professor in philosophy at . . ." but a Black speaker, also a professor, is described as "teaches philosophy at . . ."; or where the male speaker's title (Dr., Prof.) is included by the female speaker's is not).
- e. Where possible try to include local and junior scholars.
 - f. Signal willingness to accommodate scholars with disabilities or other particularized needs.
 - i. Make an effort to provide information about the kinds of accommodations you can provide, in order to enable and encourage scholars to attend, in the invitations, call for papers, or conference announcement.
 - ii. Whenever possible, do not require participants to disclose their needs as that can make them feel that they are a burden on the conference organizers, but be prepared to offer commonly required accommodations.
 - iii. Ensure that participants are made to feel at ease to ask questions about specific accommodations.
 - g. Ensure that the venue of the conference is accessible and that there are staff to assist people with disabilities.¹⁵
 - i. Consider offering opportunities for virtual participation, including opportunities for presenting and attending virtually.¹⁶
 - h. Ensure that all participants know whom to contact to address any questions or needs that may arise.
 - i. Ensure that there are sufficient breaks within the day, and stick to the announced schedule for these breaks.
 - j. Be aware of biases when identifying whom to invite.
 - i. Chances are that the first people that come to mind will be people without historical disadvantage.
 - ii. Consider invitations to junior and less well-established philosophers from underrepresented groups to avoid holding these philosophers to higher standards (e.g., disabled scholars must be famous to be included, but not so for non-disabled scholars). Remember that the familiar criteria for identifying a well-established scholar might not be applicable to all geographical locations.¹⁷
 - k. When possible, offer funding to people with additional needs (e.g., financial, accessibility

or care-related needs). If you cannot fund all speakers, consider checking whether more renowned speakers can fund their own travel, freeing up resources for less well-resourced speakers.

- l. Offer free registration for companions assisting an attendee with a disability and abide by all other ADA policies.
 - m. When possible, have a quiet room for rest. This is important for a range of disabilities and for participants who have medical needs or are breastfeeding, etc. It is furthermore important to make available facilities for the exercise of religious or other cultural practices.
 - n. Be mindful of who is, and who is not, asked to care for children. Investigate whether the provision of childcare facilities for the duration of the conference is possible.
 - i. Many universities have day-care facilities on or near campus, which may be able to offer a day rate for conference delegates.
 - ii. For larger conferences, if campus facilities are not available consider hosting the conference at a hotel that offers childcare and babysitting services.
 - iii. Consider setting aside funding to subsidize the use of childcare facilities by delegates.
 - iv. Be mindful of who is and who is not asked to care for children.
 - o. Encourage speakers to make their material accessible to all participants and make sure you know how to operate equipment in order to help speakers.¹⁸
 - p. If there is food served, be mindful of dietary restrictions of conference participants, collecting information in advance if feasible. Food to meet these dietary requirements should either be plentiful or clearly marked as reserved for the relevant people, to avoid its running out.
 - q. Consider including, at the event opening, an indigenous land statement or acknowledgment, which acknowledges indigenous peoples as the traditional stewards of the land as well as the relationships these people have to the land on which the event is occurring.
4. Department heads should ensure that conference policies are available to staff and students who are organizing events in a permanent format (e.g., intranet, handbooks) and that they are aware of it.

GOOD PRACTICE: RESEARCH PROJECTS¹⁹

Large-scale (and normally externally funded) research projects often engage in activities that fall within the scope of the Good Practice policy—hiring staff, running conferences, and so on. We recognize that some such projects may wish to sign up to the Good Practices independently of (or in addition to) the departments of the project’s investigators; this document allows this by, in effect, pulling together the relevant recommendations from the other Good Practice documents. The term “management team” below is used to refer to whoever takes overall responsibility for the project. This might be the PI, the PI together with co-investigators, or some larger group.

HIRING PANELS AND EVENTS

Management teams should adhere to all of the policies listed in the “Hiring, Promotion, and Retention” document.

CONFERENCES AND SEMINAR SERIES

Management teams should implement all of the recommendations in the “Conferences and Events” document.

CAREGIVERS

The management team should implement all of the relevant recommendations in the “Caregivers” document.

PUBLICATION OF EDITED COLLECTIONS

Large research projects often produce edited collections as outputs. The editorial team should take steps to ensure that people from underrepresented groups are well represented amongst the contributors to any such collection.²⁰

ADVISORY BOARDS, RESEARCH STUDENTS, AND OTHER ASSOCIATED PEOPLE

Where the research project involves the formation of an advisory board, visiting fellowships, PhD studentships, etc., the management team should take concrete steps towards ensuring that people from underrepresented groups are well represented amongst the members and applicants.

GOOD PRACTICE: LEARNED SOCIETIES²¹

As national bodies with some influence, especially when it comes to philosophy conferences and journals, learned societies are well placed to make a concrete difference to the representation of underrepresented groups in philosophy. We suggest that learned societies adopt the following policy.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS

Learned societies should ensure that a reasonable proportion of people from underrepresented groups are nominated for positions on their executive committees and for official positions (president, secretary, etc.).

CONFERENCES

1. Where learned societies organize their own conferences and seminar series, they should follow the relevant Good Practice recommendations on Conferences and Events (see above).

2. Where learned societies distribute funding to others to organize conferences and seminar series, they should consider making it a requirement of funding that the conference organizers follow the relevant Good Practice recommendations on Conferences and Events (see above).
 3. Learned societies should consider adopting a formal policy on chairing seminars/conference sessions for their own events and/or for those that they fund. See again the Good Practice recommendations on Conferences and Events, for some specific proposals you might consider implementing.
 4. Learned societies should monitor the proportion of people from underrepresented groups speaking at conferences and seminar series that they fund. Where a conference or seminar series manifests an obvious imbalance, the learned society should make inquiries about the steps taken to promote representation, in order to satisfy themselves that appropriate steps were taken by the organizers.
- c. Collect data on diversity-relevant publishing practices, e.g., submission and publication rates for members of underrepresented groups, referee and editorial board composition, etc. and track progress in increasing diversity in your journal.
 - d. Issue regular reports on new commitments to diversity in the journals and report on progress towards achieving goals or targets.
 - i. Consider including data on the journal's demographics, makeup of editorial board, referee pool, authorships, and submissions.
3. Implement promising practices to meet these goals or targets and increase diversity in your journal, such as:
 - a. Solicit submissions of promising work by members of underrepresented groups or working in underrepresented linguistic traditions. (PhilPeople might be a useful resource. See also the Barcelona Principles for a Globally Inclusive Philosophy.²³)
 - b. Aim to include a fair representation of relevant work by members of underrepresented groups.²⁴
 - c. Consider publishing more papers on important but neglected topics of interest to a diverse range of philosophers. This might include increasing the proportions of articles published in value theory, history, feminism, race, disability, and philosophical work in less commonly studied philosophical traditions.
 - d. Weigh the value of anonymity and non-anonymous editorial discretion, bearing in mind that evidence is mixed regarding the effectiveness of anonymous review in increasing diversity. Take special care to ensure that any non-anonymous parts of the review process do not omit or unfairly disadvantage authors from underrepresented groups.
 - e. Attend to your regional context as well as the overall global context (e.g., the importance of including adequate geographical and indigenous representation in your journal).

GOOD PRACTICE POLICY: JOURNALS²²

Publication in philosophy journals plays a major role in the reputation and career progression of their authors, as—to a lesser extent—does participation in the selection process through membership of editorial boards, refereeing, etc. The recommendations below aim to ensure that, as far as possible, members of underrepresented groups are not disadvantaged in either capacity.

1. Diversify representatives—editors, editorial board members, referees, trustees, staff, etc.—to include more people from underrepresented groups (including philosophers residing in non-Anglophone majority countries) and on important but neglected topics of interest to a diverse range of philosophers, utilizing a diverse range of methods.
 - a. Commit to inclusion with influence (see Hiring, Retention and Promotion for definition).
 - b. Ensure that member contributions are recognized and, where possible, appropriately compensated and rewarded.
2. Set specific, achievable goals or targets to make progress in increasing diversity in authorship and content in your journal.
 - a. Consider publishing and promoting work by people from underrepresented groups at least in proportion to their presence in the part of the discipline that your journal covers.
 - b. Consider including at least one special issue or symposium engaging with works by underrepresented philosophers or in underrepresented areas of philosophy in your journal.
4. Implement diversity-supporting referee practices, such as:
 - a. Be alert for possible patterns of bias in editorial desk rejections.
 - b. Encourage referees and authors to avoid using language or examples that are insensitive to cultural differences or that inappropriately

- exclude or offend any group of people based on their ability/disability, age, ethnicity and race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, nationality, etc.
- c. Encourage referees and authors to check that papers cite and discuss related work and that work by people from underrepresented groups have not been overlooked.
 - d. Request referees not to google paper titles or request that they alert the editor prior to refereeing the paper if they know or have a strong suspicion about who wrote it.
 - e. Encourage referees to not reject promising papers on grounds of writing quality, if the concerns are merely stylistic, can be repaired to an adequate level, and the philosophical content is good. This helps ensure fair consideration of work by philosophers who are not native speakers of English.
 - f. Encourage referees to consider accepting papers on topics of interest to underrepresented groups in philosophy and on important but neglected topics of interest to a diverse range of philosophers.
 - g. Encourage timely and developmental reviews, since members of vulnerable groups are especially disadvantaged by long delays before publication.
 - h. The editorial board should consider providing referees with an explicit editorial policy on refereeing.²⁵
5. Implement promising practices to increase accessibility in journals, such as:
 - a. Create structurally tagged content, which includes clearly marked headings, image descriptions, and scroll over text to assist screen readers parsing the page structure.²⁶
 - b. Utilize text-to-speech capability for print-impaired users in the absence of an audio book.
 - c. Include a navigable table of contents within your publications, and provide a defined reading order (including, for example, appropriate links between the main flow of the text and any sidebar or box out text) to help those reading through audio to navigate their way through the article.
 - d. Include Alt-text descriptions to explain illustrations for readers with reduced access to graphic information.
 - e. Give readers control over the font (size, style, and color), background color, and line spacing for online publications, and/or make them available in html.
 - f. Consider trying to make your journal more accessible for those in locations or at institutions that lack sufficient funding e.g., by making your journal open access in those regions.
 - g. Employ W3C web accessibility standards where feasible, and check for web accessibility.
6. Evaluate progress at regular intervals and revise practices accordingly.
 - a. Where possible, work with researchers to identify particular areas to improve for achieving better representation of authors and marginalized philosophies.
 - b. Isolate and implement evidence-based practices that increase diversity in the identified areas.
 - c. Identify barriers to making progress on achieving diversity goals.
 - d. Communicate, collaborate, and advocate to overcome identified barriers. Certain academic publishers have policies that hinder progress. Assertively engage with the issue where possible.
 7. Officially adopt these diversity-promoting practices and widely publicize your journal's goals or targets and commitment to promoting diversity.
 - a. Inform all representatives and bind future representatives to uphold these standards.
 - b. Publicly and explicitly adopt diversity-promoting practices, helping to create a culture of concern that enhances the journal's reputation for welcoming diversity, attracting more diverse submissions.

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NOTES

1. See <https://bpa.ac.uk/diversity/good-practice-scheme/>.
2. See <https://women-in-philosophy.org/>.
3. The passages of this section are taken from the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Policy General Guidance available at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/General-guidance.pdf>.
4. Passages on faculty recruitment, in this section, are adapted from the APA Blog on Diversity and Equity in Recruitment (available at <https://blog.apaonline.org/2021/06/07/diversity-and-equity-in-recruitment/>) as well as the Gender Bias section of the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Scheme. Many passages on faculty tenure, in this section, are adapted from the *Good Tenure Evaluation in Advice for Tenured Faculty, Department Chairs, and Academic Administrators: A Joint Project of The American Council on Education, The American Association of University Professors, and United Educators Insurance Risk Retention Group* (available at <https://www.aaup.org/issues/tenure/resources-tenure>).
5. See <https://updirectory.apaonline.org/>.
6. Material in this section has been adapted from the American Sociological Association Statement on Student Evaluations of Teaching available at https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/asa_statement_on_student_evaluations_of_teaching_feb132020.pdf.
7. Passages in this section have been adapted from the Oxford University Faculty of Law Good Practices Guide available at <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-and-subject-groups/jurisprudence-oxford/good-practices-guidelines> as well as from the APA's Good Practices Guide available at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Good_Practices_Guide_2019.pdf.
8. Some resources include the UPDirectory, the APA Diversity Syllabus Collection (available at <https://www.apaonline.org/diversitysyllabi>), <https://thedevariantphilosopher.org>, <https://diversityreadinglist.org>, and <https://projectvox.org/teaching>.
9. For the passages on sexual harassment we relied heavily on the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Policy General Guidance available at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/General-guidance.pdf>.
10. See the definition of Sexual Harassment by the US Department of the Interior on which the definitions in this section draw: <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eeo/Sexual-Harassment>.
11. For the following suggestions, see the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Scheme: Sexual Harassment at <https://bpa.ac.uk/diversity/good-practice-scheme/guidance-and-resources/sexual-harassment-3/>.
12. This section has been adapted from the BPA Good Practice scheme on staff-student relationships <https://bpa.ac.uk/diversity/good-practice-scheme/guidance-and-resources/staff-student-relationships-3/>.
13. See the section on Caregivers of the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Scheme at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Caregivers.pdf>.
14. Points in this section have been adapted from the APA's Good Practices Guide (available at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Good_Practices_Guide_2019.pdf), the Oxford University Faculty of Law Good Practices Guide (available at <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-and-subject-groups/jurisprudence-oxford/good-practices-guidelines>), the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy Guidelines for Conference Hosting (available at http://cswip.ca/images/uploads/CSWIP_Accessibility_Working_Group_Document.pdf), and the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Policy General guidance (available at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/All-GP-docs.pdf>).
15. For guidance, see https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Conferences.pdf and for public lectures, in particular, see https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Public-Lectures.pdf.
16. For suggestions on how to accomplish this, see, for example, Helen Beebee's post on Running Hybrid Events (<http://www.projects.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/lewis/running-hybrid-events/>).
17. See the UPDirectory (<https://updirectory.apaonline.org/>) for possibilities.
18. See the BPA Accessibility Guidelines (https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Conferences.pdf).
19. This section has been adapted from the BPA Good Practice Scheme on research projects available at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Research-projects.pdf>.
20. The UPDirectory (<https://updirectory.apaonline.org/>) is one resource.
21. This section has been adapted from the BPA Good Practice Scheme on Learned Societies available at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Learned-societies.pdf>.
22. Passages in this section have been adapted from the APA's Good Practices Guide available at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Good_Practices_Guide_2019.pdf as well as the BPA/SWIP Good Practice Policy General guidance (available at <https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/All-GP-docs.pdf>).
23. See <https://philpeople.org/> and <https://contesi.wordpress.com/bp/>.
24. Diversity Reading List (<https://diversityreadinglist.org/>) and UPDirectory (<https://updirectory.apaonline.org/>) might be useful resources.
25. See, for example, the *Journal of Cognition* Referee Guidelines (<https://www.journalofcognition.org/about/editorialpolicies/>).
26. For example, see <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20-TECHS/PDF3.html>.

INTERVIEW

Philosophy of Liberation: A Conversation with Nigerian Philosopher Abosede Priscilla Ipadeola

The conversation was conducted (remotely) by Björn Freter on February 13, 2025, in Baltimore, MD. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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Björn Freter: Welcome, dear Abosede. I am so very glad and honored to have the opportunity to speak with you today! You have written a most important book, *Feminist African Philosophy: Women and the Politics of Difference*.¹ Could you define for us what you understand as African philosophy—as this is a thing that continues to be discussed? I know this is an unfairly big question.

Abosede Priscilla Ipadeola: Before I start to answer your questions, I would like to thank you very much. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to have this conversation with you. Wow, this is a very big question!

Whenever we have new students coming to study philosophy—I have been teaching philosophy for so many years—what we tell them: unfortunately, you are coming to study a course that does not have the definition that everybody agrees that this is the definition that applies in every situation. Philosophy is notorious for that. It is difficult to say this is what it is.

If you look at how I structured the book *Feminist African Philosophy*, I know that this is an important question that should be addressed, and I tried to address it in the first chapter of the book. The approach that I took was to look at it from different perspectives. I do not give a perspective or an answer that is too narrow. I try to look at it from three different approaches. I am not saying that my approach is exhaustive of everything there is to be said.

I looked at the question of African philosophy historically and I considered some ideas of some historians of African philosophy. For example, I looked at the work of Professor Barry Hallen² who claims that African philosophy—he was not the first philosopher to say this; I think Cheik Anta Diop had already said that before him—that the beginning of African philosophy is found in ancient Egypt, especially if we consider the work of a thinker called Ptahhotep. That is where the beginning is. That position has been essentially criticized; it's been debated that there is no known link between philosophy and whatever it was they were doing in ancient Egypt and what we currently have in contemporary Africa. The flow of thought from ancient Egypt down to contemporary Africa has not been so consistent, there has been no nexus between the two—in that sense [critics say] it does not make sense, logically, to claim that African philosophy dates back to ancient Egypt.

Some historians of African philosophy are comfortable to trace its origin down to Ethiopia, especially to a man called Zara Yacob. They have pointed out some ideas in Zara Yacob that are similar to what we have on the continent among some African peoples, African communities, African societies in contemporary Africa.

Another position has been to look at what the Ghanaian—born in Ghana, trained in the West—philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo did. What Anton Wilhelm Amo did as a philosopher is believed by some to be the genesis of African philosophy.

Every one of these positions has its problems. For example, talking about Anton Wilhelm Amo. The question is where was he trained? He was taken as a child to the Netherlands, then later to Germany as a slave. He was trained in Germany. Essentially, what he was exposed to was German philosophy, not African philosophy. That shaped his worldview, his thought, and his philosophical perspective. It is really complicated, however. I leave that open.

To know what African philosophy is—the history is important. That is my argument. I would not say it is here or there. For me, every bit of this history comes together to define African philosophy. And if we look at them critically, they contain something important to illuminate the past for contemporary African philosophers to [understand] what we should deem important. The issues have not changed too much. The issues are still extant.

That is one of the approaches. Then, there is a second approach, where I look at the trends, the schools of thought. According to Henry Odera Orika, a Kenyan philosopher, there are different trends or schools of thought. The first one is Ethnophilosophy. Placide Tempel's *Bantu Philosophy* and in Alexis Kagame also. According to this school, if we are trying to identify African philosophy, then we should look at stories, folklore, folktales, songs, proverbs, sayings, and myths in African societies. Each African community has those ideas, those sayings, those songs that contain their philosophies. However, because many of those ideas have been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, not written down, passed down orally from generation to generation, they have been preserved in these forms. To understand what African philosophy is, they argue, we should look at those cultural elements, they contain African people's philosophical ideas and perspectives.

Another approach is the philosophic sagacity. Henry Odera Orika was a strong critique of ethnophilosophy. According to him, all these sayings are not philosophical because we don't know their authors or originators. For him, in order for us to claim that there is philosophy in Africa, we must be able to identify African philosophers who came up with specific African philosophical ideas. Just like in the West, where we know about Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Descartes, Hume, Lock, Sartre, Quine, John Rawls, we must be able to know the names of African philosophers who talked about a philosophical issue, say a metaphysical problem, or an ethical theory. We must be able to identify them, and on that basis, he rejected ethnophilosophy and gave us the philosophic sagacity instead. In Orika's view, those sages, he called them philosophic sages, were still in existence when he was conducting his research and he only needed to look for them. So he decided to go to rural areas in Kenya to look for those philosophic sages. According to him, philosophic sages are people who have been able to transcend the collective or communal ideas of their societies. They have been able to stay back and examine those ideas and they have come up with their own ideas that are philosophically sound. He interviewed some sages who had no external influence, they were not influenced by the West especially. They thought in such a way that they stood out from the community. They were able to come up with their own ideas. He identified about five or six sages. Out of the people he interviewed, he categorized some as folk sages and he categorized some as philosophic sages. Philosophic sages are comparable to renowned Western philosophers. The folk sages are wise people, wise men and women—he interviewed only one woman. I have criticized that in the book. I link that to the method he used—he used the Socratic method. He found the Socratic method to be brilliant and useful and he adopted

it. If you look at the method when it was originally used, talking about the people Socrates interviewed—you could mention so many men’s names, Euthyphro, Theaetetus, Thrasymachus, Crito, Glaucon, so many of them. But if you are looking for the women that he spoke with, then you begin to think hard. Eventually, you will be able to come up with only two names: Aspasia and Diotima. Those are the only two. These women’s names are just there, no detailed records of his conversations with them. Unlike what you have with the men. You have Euthyphro talking about piety, Theaetetus talking about knowledge. You have these detailed arguments; you don’t have that about the women. Henry Odera Oruka adopted that method and used it in Africa and came up with a similar result. What he got was strikingly similar to what Socrates came up with, or what Plato came up with. You realize you have names of men that Odera Oruka interviewed and he categorized them as philosophic sages. He interviewed only one woman, named Perish [Njuhi Muthoni],³ and this one woman, according to Oruka, could not even measure up to the level of a philosophic sage; she ended up being categorized as a folk sage. That is just that! I could talk about this for hours, but I think I [will] move to another school of thought now.

There is another school of thought, called professional philosophy. In professional philosophy, you have professionally trained philosophers in different philosophy departments across the continent. This is where you have the faculty, the academics who work in these departments. If one moves from one department to another across the continent, one notices the same problem. I founded an association for African Women Philosophers one year ago.⁴ We just had our first anniversary conference three weeks ago—which was really historic, I must say! In many departments of philosophy, you don’t have any woman, no women at all—in some places, you have maybe one woman or two. LAWP, that is The League of African Women Philosophers is an association which brings African women philosophers together. LAWP members are currently from about eight or nine African countries. There are some of them where you have just one woman philosopher, maybe two women philosophers from the country, the entire country. Not much attention has been paid to this.

I have also observed a more fundamental problem with professional philosophy in Africa. And that is about our curriculum. And that is that women’s issues are conspicuously absent. In many of our curriculums women’s issues are not there. Nobody wants to talk about them. We don’t consider them to be of any value or relevance for philosophy. Philosophers are supposed to analyze, to critique, [and] to come up with theories to address different existential issues—but we don’t talk about African women’s issues. That is one of the problems.

There is another philosophical school called nationalist-ideological philosophy or nationalist ideology. And this talks about people who fought against the colonizers, who fought colonialism back to Europe, who wanted independence for different African countries. If you look at that, you will realize that even though some women were also active thinkers [and] activists in the movement that led the emancipation of African countries from the grip of

colonialism, you don’t get to hear those people’s names. For example, when Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon Damas, and Aimé Césaire were in Paris talking about Négritude, there were three sisters, the Nardal sisters, Paulette, Jeanne, and Andrée Nardal. These three women were the ones who provided the space where they thought the idea of Négritude through. Those people did not just offer their parlor just for them to have a place to talk about Négritude, they were also thinkers in their own right, also thinking, also contributing to the discussions taking place in Paris at the time. But until very recently, maybe less than five or ten years ago, nothing was known about them and their vital contributions to the discourse on Négritude. Their names are just coming out of obscurity; we are just getting to learn about them. Even today many people do not know about these women. Many people do not know that there were women who also contributed to the discussions that led to the formulation of the political theory called Négritude that has had so much influence, especially when talking about Pan-Africanism. Those women were there, they also contributed to the discussions, but their names are nowhere to be found. There are so many examples of women thinkers that have contributed to the formulation of important theories, African theories, theories that those fathers, those patriarchs [allegedly] came up with. However, their history has just been silenced and their names are nowhere to be found.

Right from when I started philosophy as an undergraduate student I kept hearing about Léopold Sédar Senghor, about Aimé Césaire, and I have been hearing about these patriarchs, but these women? I have never heard about them until recently. That is how theories are formulated or shaped in such a way that the women’s perspectives, voices, ideas, and contributions are kept away, left out. Even before I started studying philosophy, perhaps from my elementary school days, I kept hearing about those fathers who liberated Africa.

BF: The marginalization of female African philosophy is certainly one of the sad coincidences where the Western history and the African history of philosophy—even though these are such large concepts—in a very sad way agree, or have agreed for a very long time. In Western philosophy, we have many concepts developed by contributions by women, but these histories are no longer known. The strangest thing is that they are no longer known because, at some point people, real human beings, decided to write them out of history.

Let us move on to another issue. African philosophy is certainly more recognized in Western academia than probably just ten years ago, but it is still far away from being properly recognized as part of the human undertaking of philosophy, which is, for example, shown in the fact that even in your book you had to have a chapter addressing what African philosophy is, which certainly has to do with the fact that it is still contested that there is there something like that. Western philosophy books do not begin by asking if Western philosophy exists. They also introduce this paradigm that a philosophy is only a philosophy if it has a history where everything is connected with each other. Why is that necessarily the case? Just because Zera

Yacob is not connected to Ptahhotep, and Ptahhotep is not connected to, I don't know, Senghor, does that really matter? Is that required? What, in your opinion, are the ongoing reasons that, for example, Western institutions or Western philosophers still have such trouble accepting that there is something like African philosophy or philosophy from African spaces?

API: Well, I think this is rooted in the history of Western philosophy itself. If one considers what prominent and respected Western thinkers have said about Africans, one would not be really surprised that Western philosophers find it difficult to accept that there is a branch of human knowledge called African philosophy or there should be anything like that. One should not be surprised that the same intellectual tradition that such people hold in high esteem, that such people cherish, also produced the kind of thinkers like Hegel, Kant, Hume, and Locke who said so many disparaging things about Africans. To be clear, I respect many of these thinkers, their ideas. If one considers Kant's categorical imperative, for instance, his position on morality, it's a prominent theory. And it's a very brilliant idea, but you have that side by side with his position on Africans, on the native Americans, and on our intellectual or cognitive capabilities.

That is why what some contemporary Western philosophers are doing is significant. They actively analyze these thinkers' ideas. They say, for example, "Okay, we follow this person up to this point, but beyond this point, we are not going with this person. We do not identify with this statement or this idea that has been provided by this thinker."

[But often] when people admire a scholar or a thinker, especially young scholars, they sometimes admire them to the point that they become an idol. They love them so much that they adore them. They see them as impeccable. In a way that whatever has come from this philosopher must be true no matter what else they have said. They do not analyze their ideas knowing that they were human too, and they were fallible, just like every human being. They don't agree that they could be fallible, so they believe that whatever they have said must be true. I think that is where the problem lies.

Contemporary philosophers identify as Kantians, as Hegelians, or you have Marxists. These thinkers have become institutions. People no longer see them as individual thinkers, as human beings who could be fallible, and who could make mistakes. Their level of intelligence has set them apart from the rest. When somebody reads their good ideas together with these racist comments, it becomes difficult for them to know what to adopt and what to reject. Because they've lifted them to a level of becoming—I should say, pardon my term—demi gods, it becomes difficult for them to say, no, I accept this, but I do not accept this. They accept everything. That is where I think the problem lies.

BF: I think that's very plausible. That's not necessarily an intellectual commitment to, let's say, Kant. That's an emotional commitment. This is my hero. My hero didn't do bad things, but the problem is—he did. And we have

come to terms with that. I think it's a very plausible answer that you say that it's actually something very surprising because to say Western philosophers, who judged so many times other cultures for being not rational enough, are themselves having a very, very emotional connection to their heroes, in fact, they are so connected to them that if African philosophers approach them and say, well, what about all the racism? They say it didn't happen. It's like somebody being in love with someone and then they see them do something awful and say it did not happen. I can really relate to that answer.

API: As a matter of fact, even when some of them agree, like when you show them evidence from say Kant's writings, what David Hume wrote when he said that an African is just like a parrot. When you show them things like that and they agree, yes, this scholar actually or this thinker actually wrote this, they say, well, you know, he existed a long time ago. It doesn't really matter. He was not a bad person. He was just a child of his time.

Recently, I talked about a theory, an African philosophical theory that I'm still developing, that criticizes capitalism and Marxism. In my view, capitalism asks us to sacrifice equality while Marxism asks us to sacrifice freedom. And I am proposing a theory—that I did not come up with—about a practice that has been in existence for centuries among my people and I'm just trying to bring it up. It's called *àró* in Yoruba. So, I talked about that and unfortunately for me, there was a Marxist there—he was triggered. And he began to say, no, we need to be reasonable. You know, I could see the kind of emotional attachment he had to Karl Marx. I had to tell him that, when you come across a new idea you should analyze the idea objectively. If you have anything against my idea, let me know. But because I criticized Karl Marx's communism, he wasn't ready to hear any other thing. To some of them, that is not acceptable. Whatever you have to say, just don't talk against this person's idea.

I think that is what philosophy is basically about: we analyze issues, theories, and ideas. We look at inconsistencies, we look at flaws. We highlight those flaws in order to make the ideas better, and to better our world because ideas shape the world. They shape the way we live. They determine how we live. Our worldviews determine our attitude, how we live, and our attitude to people and things. But some people are so committed, so devoted to their heroes that they don't just want you to say anything against their ideas. That is where the problem lies.

BF: I agree. And it's strange. I have experienced similar things when I criticize Western philosophers. There is a very emotional reaction to it, and you see prominent philosophers basically like love-blinded teenagers just running to save their elders.

I wanted to bring the interview a little bit in the context of where it's happening. This interview is done for the APA Studies on Philosophy and the Black Experience. Do you have a particular understanding of African American philosophy?

API: Actually, I'm still learning about it, to be honest. I ordered this book sometime last year; it's titled *African American Philosophers and Philosophy: An Introduction to the History, Concepts and Contemporary Issues*. It's edited by Stephen C. Ferguson II and John H. McClendon III. I ordered the book immediately when I saw it. I said, yes, I must get this book. I got it last year, in 2024, and I'm still reading it.

I think the basic difference between African philosophy and Africana philosophy lies in the two events or maybe phenomena that have shaped the history of Africa[na philosophy] over the years. That is colonialism for Africans on the continent and then slavery for Africana philosophy and also, finally, for Africa, for philosophers of African descent and people of African descent in the diaspora, finding their place where they are in the diaspora. Therefore, for the African diaspora, I think their philosophy revolves around the issues of identity, freedom, history, finding their own place, and finding their autonomy, where they are.

BF: [I was wondering what] you think would be important connections in the philosophical work that could be done between African and African American philosophers. I think you just answered that by pointing out that there is a shared history of suppression. Would you agree that still one of the predominant works that need to be done is, in some way or the other, to philosophize through this suppression and then, of course, philosophize towards liberation? That's, I think, the overall topic that I find in pretty much all of your work. It is always a philosophy of liberation. You have a very accentuated approach to philosophy as liberation. In your book, you even asked what philosophy is about if it is not liberating. What kind of collaborations are you aware of between the continental and the North African American philosophy?

API: Hmm, I think I need to learn about it. I am not really aware of so much collaboration, but I would not say that it does not exist. As a matter of fact, it does exist. For example, there are scholars from Africa, like Segun Gbadegesin, Nkiru Nzegwu, and Olúfẹ́mi Táiwò, who were trained on the continent who also taught philosophy for some time on the continent before moving to the US. The point of connection between the two is philosophizing through repression and oppression to freedom, liberation, and emancipation. This is crucial. And I also think our shared history, destiny, all these other shared ideals that we have mentioned. They are definitely relevant both for African philosophy and Africana philosophy. They are important points of intersection of philosophizing in different contexts. The experiences are still very much similar, like I mentioned, the phenomena on the continent and outside the continent for people of African descent, are pretty much similar and the same. The same set of events or phenomena have shaped our lives.

BF: From that point, let us return to your book again. One of the many aspects of why I think your book is so important is that you provide some quite astonishing new approaches to overcoming the problem of male supremacy. And we'll talk about that in a moment. There's one passage where you write: "African philosophers have glaringly failed to call attention to the oppression of women, which is

concealed in many of the African autochthonous sayings, values, traditions, beliefs, practices, and Indigenous cultures."⁵ Could you share with us a little bit about your current understanding of the problem of male supremacy in philosophy, not necessarily only in academia? What is the impact that you currently still feel of male supremacy in philosophy?

API: There are many practices, ideas, and beliefs that are oppressive in a way, and that exemplify male supremacy. In Africa we are just disregarded; we've not been paid much attention to over the years. For example, I will talk about proverbs that depict women as evil or as bad. Many philosophers (ethnophilosophers) still believe that proverbs are important for understanding African philosophy. And apart from what we do in academia, in everyday life in Africa, people are attached to those proverbs. Those sayings enliven discussions, they provide guidance to people when they are making important decisions. So, when such sayings contain derogatory terms or ideas about women, you can imagine the outcome of a decision that is made by someone who believes in the wisdom and veracity of such proverbs. One practice I'll also mention is that—it is not even a practice but a belief—a metaphysical belief is witchcraft. This is a belief that has negatively affected so many women. Many women have lost their lives as a result of being accused of being witches. For example, because some people believe that when a woman is a witch, then, she should not be allowed to live. So many women have been killed as a result of that. And even when in situations where they are not killed, many have been maimed, many have been ostracized because they've been accused of witchcraft, of being witches.

Of course, it's a popular belief across Africa that men also have supernatural or metaphysical powers—but they don't die because of that. Women do. Then my question as a feminist philosopher, as a feminist African philosopher would be, why? Why should women die because of that while men don't die because of that? Those are the inconsistencies I point out.

Also, moral beliefs, moral codes. Some moral requirements are against women. For example, in some traditional African societies, a woman is required to remain a virgin up to the point that she gets married. But for a man, nothing or nobody compels him to keep his virginity until he gets married. These are just some examples from our indigenous African cultural practices and beliefs. There are so many others.

BF: It's a fascinatingly global issue of women having to be a virgin while the man can walk around and apparently have intercourse with women who are just lost because they are no longer virgins. It's always beautifully crafted: I fulfill my ethical duty when I do whatever I want, and you fulfill your ethical duty when you do whatever I want you to do. In fact, if we would finally start taking it seriously, we would have to say that male violence is a cornerstone of the intellectual development of many spaces. It is amazing how intentionally we blind ourselves to these issues—which is why your book is so important. What I find fascinating in your book is that you connect all these issues

of suppression, be it misogyny or colonial suppression, and you all look at all that from an epistemological angle. How did it happen that this discipline, this approach from an epistemological point of view became your point of view?

API: I firmly believe that epistemology is crucial. It's very important when we are talking about philosophy. It is a foundation, an important pillar that supports philosophy itself. And because of the other side of epistemology that people don't always talk about. That is how it wields power, it's able to exercise power over people. It has real implications for how people live. It's able to determine how people live. That is what I think makes epistemology very important—to correct so many wrong or erroneous ideas and to bring about the kind of change that is required to emancipate, to refrain from oppression, from marginalization. It's important to pay attention to epistemology, it is absolutely important.

BF: In your book, you call it epistemic tyranny that women very often have to face, and you connect that in a very interesting way to Fricker and Feyerabend.⁶ And as I said, overall, your philosophy is a philosophy of liberation. And you also say that the antidote to epistemic tyranny is epistemic freedom. You write that epistemic freedom "means giving [women] the right to judge and justify their epistemic ideas from the perspective as knowers."⁷ You want to finally establish that women's knowledge is knowledge as well. Can you elaborate a little bit on this idea of taking women seriously as knowers?

API: Yes. As I pointed out in *Feminist African Philosophy*, epistemics in certain African contexts rarely involve gender knowledge. [You are in no way] considered to have the right to be justified to know if you are from a particular [for instance, the female] gender. According to this erroneous epistemic scheme, if a person, the knower is of another [for instance, the female] gender. In some epistemic contexts, it is believed that women cannot know, they do not or are not justified to know. As a feminist African epistemologist, I argue against this type of epistemic discrimination. Women should be recognized as knowers. And when their method of their justification is not the same as the traditional criteria or when they are not offering the same justification as, say, a male knower, that does not invalidate their knowledge claim. Rather, their knowledge claims should be studied or should be examined within their epistemic sphere. Yes, their knowledge claim should be examined independently, not in connection with or subjected to some criteria that have been provided by or maybe in some other epistemic domains. They should be examined independently and objectively. They should be looked at for consistency within the knowledge claim itself without alluding to or involving external criteria that are not generated from within the domain where that knowledge is produced to evaluate the knowledge claim.

BF: But you would say that women's knowledge is historically evolved knowledge? Or would you say that there is something essentially known by women?

API: There is so much to say about this, but maybe I should just provide an example. Because of how women have

been treated over time, that is, the gender injustice of being relegated to the private sphere in many societies across the world, and in Africa as well, there are some things that they experience that the men do not necessarily get to experience because they do not walk within that space, they have not necessarily been confined to that space. This situation can be both limiting and liberating at the same time. The experiences unique to women equip them to produce knowledge that is often overlooked by conventional processes and regulatory frameworks. Why not come up with a knowledge claim that is generated from that space? My position is that knowledge produced in this context, or any other space that women occupy, should be understood from within that context and not be rejected or deemed invalid or dismissed because of where it has come from.

BF: The absolute highlight of your book is when you introduce a particular idea of how to deal with this interest to invalidate women's thought. You say that epistemology, of course, has to do with knowledge and you put knowledge in the context of freedom. When you claim that freedom is the goal of knowledge and knowing, that's already quite an ingenious twist, but then you add something to it. You write that "what is not knowledge is whatever engenders or perpetuates subjugation, marginalization, and oppression."⁸ This is where I, while reading your book, realized something very important has just happened here. You are basically trying to change the discourse because you're saying we do not need to actually analyze that which only exists to suppress. In other words: I don't have to argue with a racist proposition because that proposition is irrelevant as it is disqualified as knowledge, because you cannot "know" something suppressive. Women have been disregarded so many times, and yet no philosopher has ever provided anything even remotely looking like a proof for the inferiority of women. It's pretty obvious that we don't have that because it doesn't exist. But what you do now is to say, well, we should stop taking a look at that, because if it is only about suppression, it cannot be regarded as knowledge. Could you elaborate a little bit on this? Especially I would love to hear about what we should do, for example, in teaching and when reading these philosophers. What are the consequences of finding out that, for example, Kant's racism, or Hume's racism, or Hegel's racism when we change the idea that that is not knowledge, but not-knowledge? What do you think are the practical consequences of that idea?

API: Well, I think one practical consequence of invalidating those comments as knowledge claims is that then we'll be able to come to a point that they no longer have the power to indoctrinate young scholars. Some young scholars read [philosophers producing not-knowledge or pseudo-knowledge], and they hold them so dear, they think that [the not-knowledge claims] contain knowledge. And because of that, they are so dear to them, that they are not willing to let go of the ideas. As a result of that, the pseudo-knowledge influences their attitude, their behavior, their beliefs. And they believe it, even when they come across people who have been described as maybe primitive or uncivilized. When we argue that [suppressive claims] are not knowledge, they are not forms of knowledge, they are

not knowledge claims, then we drain them of the power that they possess to influence opinions or shape behavior.

BF: That brings me to the present day in terms of politics. As you know, there is globally a shocking development towards anti-liberation. The world develops really into a direction that you advise not to go. The idea of the strong man and the warrior who finally takes matters into his own hands is on the rise, especially, as you will know, here in the United States. It seems that the anti-democratic and anti-liberatory movements are deeply rooted in these maniacal narcissistic male supremacist fantasies that actually seem to express nothing but fragility and insecurity. What do you think about this even more dominant and more aggressive re-emergence of the strong man as the central figure in Western politics?

API: Wow, this is really tricky to be honest. It is depressing. It seems like we are going back to where we think we have left, and it's really concerning. To be honest, I think at this time all we need to do, in my opinion, is to look at how we gained the little that we were able to gain and which it seems like we are losing now. Those who fought against things like this and brought us to the point that at least many people looked at that type of domination and felt uncomfortable. How did we get there? It's important to ask ourselves. This is a time not to keep quiet but to speak out, to speak out that "no, we cannot afford to go back." Honestly, I do not know how this will go. As it continues to unfold, I think it will be important for us to remember to speak up, to speak out, to speak against suppression and marginalization. It's important to just articulate our position. We'll just continue to speak and make people realize that "no, this is not a way to go, this is not the way to live."

BF: Why do you think there is such an enthusiastic response to this idea of the strongman? There seems to be a lot of surprisingly and shockingly positive responses to that that history is filled with catastrophes caused by nothing else, but these fragile major male egos. Do you have any explanation for that?

API: Well, I don't know. I think it's all about the kind of narratives that are prominent. You know, anyone who owns the narrative controls how events happen or the course that events take. I think it's a matter of what people are being told, the kind of analyses that have been put forward, and which have become prominent in recent years and times. People have been experiencing difficulties here and there and then somebody just comes up with an explanation that it's because xyz is not there that you are facing the challenge. Therefore, to get rid of your problems the missing factors must be introduced. When individuals realize their options are limited, they may latch onto misleading narratives in an attempt to find relief.

BF: There seems to be nothing else to be done but to continue what has been done before and before. If you look into the history, for example, of women's rights. Why were women's rights at some point accepted? It's because the protest was so loud that it could not be ignored. Or colonialism. Why did colonialism end? It didn't end because colonial powers said, ah, we made a mistake; we shouldn't

do that. No, other things were becoming problems in the colonized areas. And so it becomes too stressful to continue it. We now realize that the idea, for example, of women's rights or the idea of diversity was never taken seriously. These people just did it because some people were too loud. In the literal second they were able to suppress these voices again everything was taken back—from the abortion rights to DEI. Everything is abandoned. What seems to be so important of all of this is this weird foundational desire to differentiate between me and the other. Is this something that you also observe in African traditions?

API: It is just how people think, which stems from how many people were raised. Society makes people believe that when you have two things, one must be better than the other. You know, humans, we are constantly thinking about making decisions, choosing the best option. We are taught right from childhood that when you come across varieties, you must pick the best. You have to pick out the best for yourself, you go shopping, you look around, you want to pick the best dress, we think right from childhood like that, we are taught that. We are socialized into thinking about what is best. You have parents talking about schools to send their children to, they talk about one school being better than the other. We are brought up with that notion that when you have two or more things, then one is better than the other. And we also apply that principle when we come across people. It's the way people are brought up. It's the way people are trained. It's the way people are taught to think.

BF: I'm sorry, just to understand you correctly, you would say that this is also the case in African spaces?

API: Yes, it's also the case. That is why it becomes imperative for us as philosophers to change that way of thinking by coming up with arguments that show that that way of thinking is flawed, it is not sustainable, especially when we are dealing with the other. Because ultimately, if we do not correct that impression, then we are just going to continue to create hierarchies where there should be none.

And, you know, what we think is always better, especially when it comes to relationships, or when we have human beings or between the self and the other, what usually takes place is that the one that is preferred, the one that is considered to be superior in this sense, is the one that is more powerful. That's why I talked about the gender of power in my book. The one that exercises power, that seems to be more powerful, that asserts its place or its rights, that goes with the dictum "might is right."

BF: It is such an insane argument. If you are powerful, you are able to suppress. We're not debating that. But just because you were able to do a certain thing—I don't even want to say it in front of a philosopher like you because it is so obvious—it does not entitle you to do it. How can we learn to see differences without this urge to question what's better?

API: Recently, I started thinking about a theory where I began to reflect: How do we argue for equality? Because obviously, there are differences. But how can we argue

for equality in the face of people being different from one another, some people being powerful, some people being vulnerable? And what came to my mind is the concept of mutual vulnerability, because ultimately, we are all human beings. This is not even just anthropocentric. It is about humans and non-human animals, the rest of nature, and everything. We are all mutually vulnerable. I don't even define this by looking at natural disasters or catastrophes that take place. I only look at it from this perspective: when everybody comes to this world as a baby, we are dependent, we are vulnerable. We are not independent; we depend on other people to survive. And this also takes place as people grow older. They depend on other people to become well or to sustain them, and also if people grow very old, they also get to a point where they are no longer able to take care of themselves. It happens to everybody. Whether one is male or female, it does not matter. White or black, it doesn't really matter. It happens to everybody. When people are strong, when they are powerful, they forget the issue of vulnerability. I think we need to emphasize it. We need to underscore that idea of mutual vulnerability. That's the way I see it. I'm just thinking about it. Maybe I don't have the perfect answer.

BF: I think that's an interesting, very interesting idea. We will soon come to an end. I just have two final questions. What do you think are the most important debates currently in African philosophy?

API: African philosophers are looking at different issues, but I think the issue of women's place in philosophy is one of the dominant issues that we have been talking about in African philosophy for some time now. African philosophers are paying more attention to the issue of women, women's rights, and women's contributions to African philosophy.

BF: And as my last question, what would you be your recommendation for an African American philosopher if they wanted to invest some time into African philosophy when it comes to issues of African women philosophers?

API: I would recommend that African American philosophers, as well as other scholars who are interested in the works of continental African women philosophers, should start by getting to know that African women philosophers exist and we are working. Although we are few, we do exist and are making great contributions to both global and African philosophies. Additionally, they must try to know some of us. To know about African women philosophers and what many of us are working on, the web page of the League of African Women Philosophers is a great place to start. The League of African Women Philosophers provides a platform for African women in philosophy to connect, collaborate on research, mentor, and support one another. You can find us at <https://leagueofafricanwomenphilosophers.org/team>.

BF: Thank you so very much for your time and for sharing all your wisdom with us!

API: Thank you so much for inviting me. Thank you for having me.

NOTES

1. Abosede Priscilla Ipadeola, *Feminist African Philosophy: Women and the Politics of Difference* (Routledge, 2023). See the review of this book: Björn Freter, "An Ingenious Revolution of Epistemology: A Review of Abosede Priscilla Ipadeola's *Feminist African Philosophy: Women and the Politics of Difference*," *APA Studies on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 24, no. 1 (Fall 2024): 14–17 (<https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/collection/950518C1-3421-484C-8153-CDA6ED737182/BlackExperienceV24n1.pdf>).
2. See Barry Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Indiana University Press, 2009).
3. See Henry Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy* (Brill, 1990), 104–107.
4. See <https://leagueofafricanwomenphilosophers.org/team>.
5. Ipadeola, *Feminist African Philosophy*, 114, xi.
6. See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press, 2007); and Paul Feyerabend, *The Tyranny of Science* (Polity, 2011).
7. Ipadeola, *Feminist African Philosophy*, 114.
8. Ipadeola, *Feminist African Philosophy*, 115.

BOOK REVIEW

A Highly Annoying and Very Questionable Book: Lazy Arguments, Pseudo-inclusion, Tokenism, a Longing to Maintain the Status Quo and Other Disturbing Oddities in Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues

Andrew Fiala and Barbara MacKinnon. *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, 10th ed. (Cengage Learning, 2024). Paperback: ISBN-13: 9780357798539. eBook: ISBN-13: 9780357798614.

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THE APPROACH OF THE BOOK

The authors of *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, a standard text extensively used by universities and colleges throughout the country, from California to Maryland, now in its tenth edition, make a welcome claim:

We have sought to include new and diverse voices among the authors we discuss and the primary sources included in the text. We have revised and updated case studies and discussion questions with this in mind. And we have explicitly addressed racial, economic, gender, and religious issues that arise in the history of philosophy. (xiv)

A surprising remark follows when the authors emphasize: "At the same time, we remain committed to a rigorous and comprehensive approach to ethical theory and applied topics" (xiv). The authors do not only feel strangely compelled to assure us that although "new and diverse

voices” have been included, they do continue to be “committed to a rigorous and comprehensive approach” (xiv). With perplexing naivety, they unveil to their readers why they must be very suspicious of the declared commitment to inclusion and diversity. The next sentence reads: “To this end, issues of inclusivity and diversity are often left as questions for student [sic!] to discuss, as they reflect on case studies, discussion questions, and the theories and frameworks discussed in the text” (xiv). The commitment to inclusion and diversity of this book is to leave “issues of inclusivity and diversity are often left as questions for student[s] to discuss” (xiv)? Can this be enough? Let us be generous readers and look at an example.

ARISTOTLE

Chapter 8 discusses virtue ethics with a strong focus on Aristotle. Students are introduced to Aristotelian concepts like *eudaimonia*, *arete*, or the *mesotes*-principle. We learn, for instance, that “Aristotle believed that the ultimate good of humans is happiness, blessedness, or prosperity” (170). This ultimate good is to be found in a “rational element” that is peculiar to us. The good for humans, then, is living in accord with this rational element” (170). This paragraph is followed by a section entitled *Aristotle on Slavery and Gender Hierarchy* and this is where it gets interesting. The authors write that Aristotle

suggested that “natural slaves” were intellectually and morally inferior—a claim that was more about ability than race. For people who are unable to govern themselves, Aristotle said slavery is both “expedient and just. This kind of thing may lead us to think twice about the very idea of virtue ethics. (171)

What an oddly cautious assessment—indeed, a philosophical idea endorsing slavery “may lead us to think twice.” This seems to be the least that could be done. Not surprisingly, we must add that there is actually much more to be done, and more should have been done. Would it not have been important to use a much more precise language? Readers of the book have, just a page ago, learned that the “ultimate good of humans is happiness” (170). However, we learn now that this sentence is not true. Aristotle does not talk about human beings *per se*. None of the allegedly inferior human beings were addressed. Aristotle talks about those he considers to be rational human beings, only for those rational beings is happiness the ultimate goal. What are the further consequences of this insight into Aristotle’s elitism? Don’t we need to re-evaluate and re-learn what we initially learned in this eighth chapter? Does this not impact on the overall ethical theory of Aristotle? The authors go on to contemplate:

Is virtue ethics too focused on the kind of virtues that are particular to roles and one’s position within the social hierarchy? Virtue ethics does not provide us with a theory of universal human rights that could be used to critique the idea of slavery or the subordination of women. Aristotle’s approach suggests that a woman’s virtue will be different from a man’s and a slave’s virtue will be different from a citizen’s. His idea is that virtues

are defined by the aims, functions, and purposes of these various natural and social roles. This view has a certain plausibility that reflects the idea that virtues are determined in relation to roles and social position. (171)

Aristotle’s understanding of virtues, we are being taught, has a “certain plausibility” as it reflects the “idea that virtues are determined in relation to roles and social position”? To say this is to state that Aristotle’s understanding of virtues is consistent with his understanding of roles and social positions. This is not very helpful. Why are we not questioning his acceptance of these roles and positions? What does it even mean that something has a “certain plausibility”? It had a “certain plausibility” that Medea killed her children, and it had a “certain plausibility” for white supremacists to introduce Jim Crow laws, and it had a “certain plausibility” that Europe invaded Africa and North America. . . . Diagnosing a “certain plausibility” means nothing.

What we need, and what especially early students of philosophy need, is an assessment, a proper critical assessment of what we are doing with Aristotle now. All right, let’s assume his ethical thinking is consistent. Does this mean that we can no longer use this system? Or does it mean that we can no longer use certain concepts and ideas because they may be tainted by Aristotelian elitism, and we may unintentionally introduce it into our post-Aristotelian thinking if we use his ideas of *eudaimonia* or *arete*? The authors do not help us. They ask,

What kind of moral theory—and what kind of theory of virtue—would we need in order to argue against slavery and the subordination of women? (171)

Is this one of the announced “issues of inclusivity and diversity [that] are often left as questions for student[s] to discuss” (xiv)? We have to be honest; the authors provide in the penultimate paragraph of this section 152 words on the important anti-supremacist re-interpretation of Aristotle by Lisa Tessman¹ (as well as an excerpt of 363 words from her in the chapter appendix—the uncommented excerpt from Aristotle is about six pages long). Her work is highly commendable, but to present her like this, as a sidenote, is by no means an opening of the discussion, but lazy tokenism.

To be clear: It would be great if a critical review—as announced—were carried out here. But instead, we find a few scattered thoughts amidst the chapter that suggest that something is wrong. But these thoughts are not embedded in the discussion of the philosopher’s work, they are rather a short digression with little depth and so little connection to the previously explained philosophical ethics that students are hardly given any opportunity to understand the problems as such. What they will learn is that there was something wrong, but we are actually fine now, since “today we would not defend the idea that a virtuous slave ought to obey their master” (171). And the reader is even provided with a whole paragraph to help us put the problem in its place:

As we conclude this critical encounter with Aristotle, it is impossible to deny that Aristotle's account has had an important and lasting influence on virtue ethics and on Western philosophy in general. But it is easy to see that some of his ideas can no longer to be taken literally in the modern world. Indeed, authors like Tessman have provided an extensive critique of Aristotle that seeks to extend the insights of Aristotle's account of virtue and happiness in ways that Aristotle would not have imagined. But the general account provided by Aristotle—that focuses on the connection between virtue, teleology, happiness, and the highest good—continues to inform our thinking about ethics. (171–72)

How is this conclusion possible? Yes, there are some difficulties, the authors seem to think, and, yes, they are important enough for us to mention them in our book, there are even some researchers working on these difficulties, but it is all fine since "the general account provided by Aristotle . . . continues to inform our thinking about ethics" (171–72). The inhumanity of Aristotle is left to some devoted specialists and relegated to a sidenote. The authors completely miss the huge problem that lies in their claim that Aristotle "continues to inform our thinking about ethics." Should we not do something about exactly that? Someone has developed an ethical system who is deeply and openly convinced of the inequality of human beings and allows himself to make this conviction an axiom of his system. How can we know that all the ideas extracted from this very system ("virtue, teleology, happiness, and the highest good" (171–72)) do not still carry the inherent superiority of the "general account"? The authors do not comment on this. Their ingenious idea is to pose a question "[w]hat kind of moral theory . . . would we need in order to argue against slavery and the subordination of women?" (171) to eventually inform us that whatever this moral theory might be, it can be built with all the well-known Aristotelian pieces. That does not seem advisable. Have the authors considered that "the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house"?²

KANT

Let us take a look at another example: Chapter 6 *Deontological Ethics*. This chapter focuses, as one would have expected, on Kant. In the beginning of the chapter, the authors note that the

concern with the basic structure of moral principles is an important feature of Kant's deontological theory. But critics have argued that his focus on abstraction may be part of the reason he failed to critically interrogate the racist and sexist assumptions of his time. There is an interesting and evolving debate among scholars about the question of what Kant meant by key terms such as "humanity" and "person," and whether he thought that women and non-Europeans were to be included among those who were worthy of respect. This scholarship shows that Kant—like other men of his generation—tended to view the world in a hierarchical fashion. As we discuss

Kant and deontological ethics in general, it is worth asking who exactly counts as a person who is worthy of respect. And it is worth considering how deontological principles can be applied to concrete issues including racism, sexism, and other topics of contemporary concern. (118)

This is a strange paragraph. We find in these remarks the same tenderness with which Aristotle was portrayed. Kant "failed to critically interrogate the racist and sexist assumptions of his time"? Wasn't the problem rather that Kant presented us with racist and sexist assumptions? There is a qualitative difference between failing to question something and endorsing it. There is indeed an evolving scholarship questioning what Kant meant when he talked about the "human being." The authors immediately jump to Kant's defense and let us know that even if it turns out that he excluded women and non-Europeans, he did it "like other men of his generation." The authors seem to forget that there were also quite a few men of his generation who did not do so, for instance, Kant's friend Theodor von Hippel or Oludah Equiano or Quobna Ottobah Cugoano or Ignatius Sancho or Benjamin Lay or Thomas Clarkson or . . .

And just because the authors write "men," we cannot forget all the women Kant could have learned from. Just think of Mary Wollstonecraft or Olympe de Gouges or Germaine de Staël or Dorothea Erxleben or Émilie du Châtelet or . . .

Let us move on and look at the way Kant is discussed later in the chapter. The remarks about Kant's unpleasant side seem forgotten. Instead, we learn, for instance,

Kant's basic moral principle, the categorical imperative, is a principle of *fairness*. (123, my emphasis)

There is much that is appealing in Kant's moral philosophy, particularly its central aspects—its focus on motives, its emphasis on *fairness*, its aim of consistency, and its basic *idea of treating persons as autonomous and morally equal beings*. (125, my emphasis)

One positive feature of Kant's moral theory is its emphasis on the *moral equality of all persons*, which is implied in his view that the nature of moral obligation is universally binding. (126, my emphasis)

This is not easy to understand. What is a student supposed to do with that? They are told that Kant might not really mean human being when he says human being; he might only mean male European human beings. But right after students have been informed about that, the authors simply continue to use a language that gives the impression that Kant was not an exclusionary philosopher. Perhaps the subsection *Kant's Views on Race and Women*—put at the very end of the section *Evaluating Kant's Moral Theory*—can help.

We have to suffer another disappointment. The very first remark on *Kant's Views of Race and Women* is a relativization, in fact, one which is presented here for the second time: "Kant was a man of his times who held objectionable views of women and non-White people" (127). We need to be straight here: This means nothing. We have already pointed out, there was a plethora of human beings not thinking like Kant thought. It is absurd to use the *Zeitgeist* to defend Kant, it underestimates his philosophical capabilities most comically. Imagine someone would use this argument to defend that someone participated in the Holocaust. Kant did not abandon his superiorism because he did not wish to do so. Nothing forced him to do so, but—how ironic—his very own will.

The next paragraph is just sad. Its first sentence reads, "Some of the details of this debate may only be of interest to devoted scholars of Kant and the European Enlightenment" (127). Excellent, we can leave it to the specialists to deal with Kantian Antihumanism. It then reads: "But the question of his racism and sexism is an important topic, worth considering as we evaluate his moral theory" (127). This is announced again, but an evaluation of Kant's ethics taking into account his racism and sexism still has not been done—and it will not be done, not in this book. In a final, again tokenistic and rather half-hearted, way, it is finally pointed out that it "may be possible to develop a critique of racism and sexism that is grounded in Kantian deontology. Indeed, Charles Mills—a Black American philosopher—has offered such a reappropriation of Kant, suggesting that it is possible to use a "deracialized" Kantian theory of morality to articulate an anti-racist social and moral theory" (127). There follow, in the same way as the authors did with Tesson, a few sentences about Mill—by the way, *not* an American philosopher; he was born in London and grew up in Kingston—and in the appendix of the chapter a generous extract of 495 words from Mill's *Black Radical Kantianism*.³

BLACK LIVES MATTER

The most gruesome act of the tragedy is now upon us—in the form of Chapter 13 *Equality and Discrimination*.

The authors return to Kant in this chapter. We find the surprisingly straightforward sentence that "Kant himself was racist" (338–39). But if we look at the context of this sentence, we must immediately become disillusioned again. It reads:

[R]acist individuals or racial supremacists who celebrate their own race take credit for something over which they have no control. . . . This explains how we might appeal to Kantian moral language to argue against racism (despite the fact that Kant himself was racist, as we discussed in Chapter 6). Racism is wrong from a Kantian perspective because it violates the autonomy of persons, failing to respect them as ends in themselves. (126)

It is admitted that Kant was racist, but, not to worry, we immediately are instructed that even though Kant was racist, his ethics were not. We can—what luck!—even explain that racism is inconsistent with Kant's very own

philosophy because it violates the autonomy of persons. We can agree, that something violating the autonomy of a person would not be permissible from a Kantian point of view. However, the authors simply ignore the fact that a Kantian person is someone who can govern themselves rationally. And thus, it is not at all inconsistent to be racist: A non-person's autonomy cannot be violated as a non-person is simply *not self-governed*, a non-person is, in the precise Greek meaning of the word, not αὐτόνομος.

There is a whole series of other rather strange arguments. Let us take a look at the section *Current Issues* of Chapter 13. We learn in a subsection on *Police Brutality and Black Lives Matter* the following:

It might be that the principle of equality also guides the thinking of those who are critical of the Black Lives Matter movement. It is likely that those who "support the blue," as the saying goes, believe that police are in fact guided by the principle of equality insofar as police are required by law to defend the law and to uphold the civil rights of people. Perhaps common ground can be found in some basic agreement about the importance of equality, fairness, and justice in policing and in response to police brutality. (345)

It's hard to believe what we just had to read here. There is no need to doubt that it is possible that those who "support the blue" believe that the police follow a principle of equality. However, believing that does not change the fact that George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, or Philando Castille are dead because the police did not follow a principle of equality. What a misguided, deeply despicable idea that those who wanted to make it explicit that black lives matter as well and who have never doubted that blue lives matter are now being asked to find "found in some basic agreement about the importance of equality, fairness, and justice" (345).⁴ It is difficult to misunderstand something more deeply than has happened here, but the authors managed to do so. Some pages later we can read:

Consider a New Jersey highway patrolman who pulls over a Black driver in a Nissan Pathfinder because the police have intelligence that Jamaican drug rings favor this car as a means for their marijuana trade in the Northeast. Is this an example of unjust discrimination or a reasonable procedure? (350)

The authors do not answer this absurd question. We have to assume that this is another example of the brilliant commitment to inclusion and diversity of this book by leaving "issues of inclusivity and diversity are often left as questions for student[s] to discuss" (xiv)?

The authors reveal their most profound confusion, their complete lack of understanding of racialized oppression, their radical under-informedness, and their blatant lack of any critical reflection in the *Chapter Summary*. I will cite without any further comment:

A significant question is whether, in opposing racism, we ought to view the world in color-blind terms or whether in opposing racism, it is preferable to be explicitly anti-racist. (350)

CONCLUSION

We can see how little this book is really interested in representing “diverse voices” (xiv), how little it is really interested in “address[ing] racial, economic, gender, and religious issues that arise in the history of philosophy” (xiv) from the fact that all the shallow attempts to do so could easily be cut out for an 11th edition. How conveniently and quickly it could be turned into a book that will be in exemplary compliance with the *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing Executive Order*.

Having had the misfortune to be forced to use this book discussed here in my teaching, every class I taught had to begin and end with a critical commentary on the contents of almost every chapter. It is an act of epistemic violence to leave such fabrications uncommented. We would teach our students that, for example, racism and misogyny are sufficiently dealt with if we leave most things as they are but add a nice, short appendix in which we quickly point out that really bad things have happened and that we have to be careful and then carry on as before.

As thinkers and educators, we cannot, and we will not be complicit in this historical distortion. In a time where Executive Order 14151 of the forty-seventh president considers DEI programs an “immense public waste and shameful discrimination”⁵ we cannot, we will not allow our students to be miseducated—again.⁶ We cannot, we will not, stand by and watch this (renewed) insidious empowerment of superiorisms like racism or sexism.

NOTES

1. See Lisa Tessmann, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford University Studies, 2005).
2. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, 2007), 110.
3. See Charles Wade Mills, “Black Radical Kantianism,” *Res Philosophica* 95 (2018): 2–23.
4. See Björn Freter, “Desuperhumanizing Whiteness,” in *Implications of Race and Racism in Student Evaluations of Teaching: The Hate U Give Students*, ed. LaVada Taylor (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022): 159–78.
5. *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing Executive* (2025) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>, n.p.
6. See Carter Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Dover Publications, [1933] 2005).